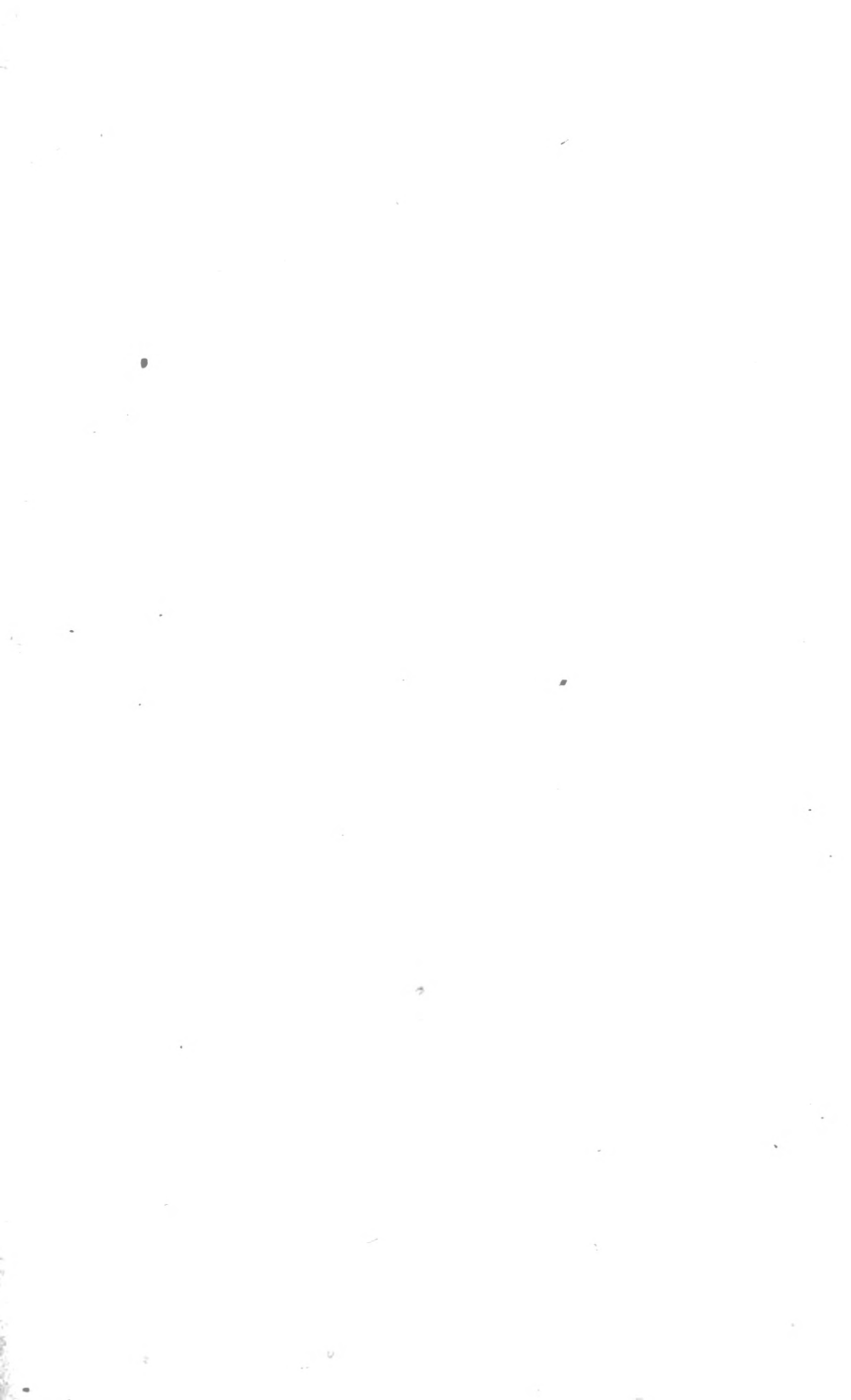




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HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY.

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. AUGUSTUS PEEL.

VOL. I.

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HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY.

CHAPTER I.

CALMLY the evening shades close round me ;
nought save the murmur of the sea is heard.
I can lean down and in spirit wander to the
time when, mingling with those waves, came
a sound more melodious, fuller, deeper than
all, chiming with my very soul, my life. I
hear it still, though *now* it is hushed for ever.

Yet it *is best*. I am still young ; have
duties, ties, strength, and power left me ;
all but what my soul yearned for, what has,
perhaps wisely, been denied ; but the
last page has been closed. To-morrow I
wake to a new existence : let the past roll

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back in those clouds of darkness in which my life has been veiled from you. Read the enclosed; learn why I have been so variable, why I have recoiled from love—*your* love; and yet I cared for you! now your bride, your wife, you will not love me less for proving to you that though in your eyes almost faultless, I have been, and still am, weak and erring.

“I have been writing my life up to the present time. Do you care to read it?” said Inez Wentworth, as she moved towards the open window where her lover was standing. “You have often thought me a mysterious girl.”

“I have always thought you a most fascinating one, Inez; but are you weeping? or does the dusk deceive me? Come near me.” and so saying, he pressed her to his heart! then, leaving her with earnest eye and cheek paler than usual, Charles Huntingdon pored over the following manuscript.

I WAS born in India, and, had my father lived I should have been sent, as numbers of children are, each year, to be educated in England, then borne back to that scorching clime, introduced, married, and settled. This was not my destiny.

My father dying in action, and my mother from ill health and a broken spirit, I was left under the care of two guardians; one, my only uncle and near relation, Colonel Wentworth; the other, one whom you have known and cared for, Edward Churchill; but he comes later on the scene. My childhood had passed ere I knew him; would that we had never met! but all must feel the same, regarding some being or other that crosses their path in life. Such trials as I have borne bring heaven nearer, for earth, till now, brought no winged herald of joy to me.

When my mother died Colonel Wentworth and his wife had only just arrived in India. He was rich, of old family, good presence,

and agreeable manner; his wife young, handsome, and clever. I will not here descant on her merits or failings. Indeed, how much better would it be, in general, if we could refrain from canvassing the conduct of others! it does not change them, but it lowers us. Let those who suffer from persecution and tyranny feel that silent submission is ever preferable to striving to clear themselves; the truth may rest with them, and falsehood on the side of the accuser; yet in all probability the powerful will flourish like a green bay tree. Then Valerie, my only cousin and companion, can I say that in you I found an honest, open-hearted friend. Alas! alas!

Mercifully, then, was it ordained that my childhood was not passed among such as these. Might not I have grown up amid scenes of treachery and falsehood, with no right ideas of justice or of mercy, like those I dwelt amongst, thinking the weak and defenceless were born only to be kept down

and humbled by the powerful. And if I had remembered the words issuing from the lips of the beautiful Mrs. Wentworth,—
“Seymour, promise me that child shall not be an infliction on me. Send her to school in England,” I might, child as I was, have blessed her for those words.

A few weeks after this, under the charge of a nurse, I left those Indian shores, glowing in all the splendour of eastern beauty, but whose scorching clime had paled my cheek and weakened my frame. How long the voyage seemed! sometimes borne along the clear calm ocean, I felt the gentle murmur of waves sounding like soft music to my childish senses; at others, tossed about 'mid storm and tempest, the waves roaring and rising like snowy mountains, till they seemed to reach the sky, which was black as night, I would hide my head and shudder till the danger passed. When the kind old captain would sometimes take me on his knee and strive to soothe me, he, with his open heart

and honest face felt for the orphan child, and perhaps thought my life would continue as it had begun, tossed on the sea of life, now calm and sunny with my first youth, then chilled and rent with trial and care. Yet my life has not been unhappy ; accident, strange chance threw me amid scenes and people that influenced my feelings and affections, which no earthly power could root out or efface. You who have watched me through many trials, feel the truth of this, nor do you blame me.

On reaching England I was placed at a school near London. Each schoolgirl's life is perhaps similar in most respects. The difference is to her without a home, except when, taking pity on my forlorn condition, a friend would ask me to accompany her home. I remained with Mrs. Holford, and experienced only kindness on her part. How many, placed as I was, entirely in her power, might have been treated differently, with harshness or neglect ! Yet those long years

of schooling I can look back on with pleasure and gratitude.

Glancing quickly over these childish years I come to a period when, cast amidst other scenes, I was subjected to trials, of which the remembrance is now softened by distance and the bitterness past and gone. Yet would not most have envied me the change; taken from school and hard study to remain for a time among gay people, with a companion of my own age? Assuredly they would: and I set off for the town where my uncle's regiment was then stationed, with a vision of happiness so sparkling and vivid that I never stopped to conjecture whether they would be cold or warm in their welcome, just or unjust in their treatment of me. At sixteen it is perhaps fortunate that we pass quickly on from scene to scene, with little thought, buoyant spirits, and no bitter memories to torture us; all is fresh, sweet, and lovely as the first burst of spring into life.

My uncle having only just returned with his regiment to England, this was my first meeting with them after so many years of separation, and as I had left India when I was very young I had no very clear recollection of my uncle and aunt, of whom I had seen but little, as I was entirely left to the care of servants and the companionship of my cousin Valerie. My other guardian, Mr. Churchill, I had never seen; he was travelling as tutor in a baronet's family on the continent. I sometimes wish that fate had divided us by sea and by land; that mountains and seas had sprung up betwixt our love. Vain wish!—I might as well hope that those waves upon the shore would cease to break at my bidding, and be still for ever.

In my aunt's letter to Mrs. Holford she had said that for another year I was to study with Valerie, who, being a year older, had dismissed her governess and was studying with masters. I should like Valerie, I

thought; and study would be pleasant with a young girl whom I could love.—Love ! one glance sufficed to make me feel *that* could never be ; admiration, interest, wonder, but not *love* ! yet how beautiful she was, bursting on my already overstrained and imaginative mind, as I might have said, an angel ; but have you ever seen one clothed with light and beauty, charming your senses, but not touching your heart ; the outward mask almost perfect, but with no soul shining through the dazzling orbs ; no truth marked or expressed in the full red lips, smiling blandly ? Such was Valerie !

When I alighted from the coach and entered a spacious house on the outskirts of the town, which was large, and seemingly thickly populated, evidently a garrison town, I received no kind of welcome. Mrs. Wentworth, I heard, was out in her carriage ; and my uncle and Valerie on horseback. I was ushered, therefore, into the drawing-room, where, with a wretched

nervous feeling, I waited their coming. Presently, a loud clear laugh rang on the staircase; and a voice, not harmonious, but somewhat harsh and loud, drew near. The door opened, and a girl, holding up her long riding-dress, and flinging aside her veil, walked into the room followed by her father and a young and handsome man, who carried her whip, and looked admiringly at her. She started on seeing me; but, holding out her hand, said—"I had no idea you could have arrived so soon. Papa, this is Inez, my infantine companion in India." My uncle drew me towards him, kissing me, and welcoming me to his house, and hoping I should be happy with them. I grew flushed, but lifting my eyes up, glanced at the trio, as they stood before me. First at my uncle, who was still handsome, but hard-looking—a regular man of the world, courteous though, and kind in manner. By him stood Valerie, tall, but not elegant-looking, or well-proportioned:

her complexion dazzling as a white cloud contrasted with the glow of an evening sunset—a deep rose hue—while golden hair swept in luxuriant tresses over her dark riding-dress; splendid eyes of light clear blue, full, intense in their expression, but with no redeeming softness to shadow the strongly marked classical features: exquisitely full mouth, finely rounded chin, and pearly teeth. As my uncle stood talking to me, Valerie turned to the young man who had entered with them, and lowering her voice to a whisper, I heard her say—“You had better go before she comes in;” and with her words a meaning smile played round her mouth. Soon after, Colonel Wentworth followed him, and Valerie, throwing herself upon the sofa, exclaimed, “What an absurd youth that is, to be sure!” Smiling, I remarked, “He is decidedly good-looking; who is he?”

“Mr. Frazer; he has not been long in the regiment: he is so silly he makes me

laugh. He talks great nonsense, as all young men of that age do, I think ; they're so tiresome ! but it is late, and my singing-master will be here directly, so I must go ; but will first show you your room." Leading the way in silence, she opened the door of my room, and begged me to excuse her, as she had not a moment to lose ; and ran hastily away. I sat at my window, after taking my bonnet off, and looked out on the high road ; on one side of which was a broad pathway bordered by a railing, over which large trees cast their shadows. It had a gay, cheerful appearance : numbers of people were passing up and down : many a pretty face passed ; and several young officers were sauntering up and down. I could watch all, unperceived by them. Evidently the music lesson had begun, for Valerie's voice, loud, clear, and bell-like, rang through the apartment near ; but, strange to say, though I had seldom heard good singing, her voice, although fine and

powerful, gave me no pleasure. It was wonderful in power and expression, but wanted, what would have made her beauty perfect, harmony. How weary I felt, listening for full an hour, to passages of difficult Italian songs, repeated over and over again, till, happily for me, the door of the room opened, and Valerie, entering mine, laughingly said:—"It is over for to-day, thank goodness! and I have come to have a chat with you. How strange it appears for us to meet again! I trust we shall not quarrel in the frightful manner my old nurse declares we did in India. I cannot say I remember it," she continued, "though I am older than you."

"Nor I either: but we must be very good friends, now, to make up for the bad behaviour of our infancy."

"Oh! I have made up my mind to like you immensely!" answered Valerie: "I am sure you are a nice little thing: will you not be glad when we have done with

all those stupid old masters, and are allowed to go out into society? I envy my friend, Agnes Wilton, every time she goes out."

"Is she a great friend of yours?" I asked.

"Yes, she was at school with me when I first came to England; and I am extremely fond of her; but she is no favourite generally, being a sentimental dreamy kind of girl, always in love."

"The pain cannot be very great, when so often repeated," I answered. "But why do you fix on so romantic a friend? You are not romantic, I am sure."

"No; that is to say, I should not enjoy love in a smoky cottage, with butchers' and bakers' bills pouring in through the jessamine and roses, with no means of paying them!" answered Valerie with a loud laugh.

"And you are too young to have felt love," I rejoined, looking at her.

"That is a thing I never could accomplish, I am confident: It's such utter folly,"

she continued, as she flung herself back and opened a book which I had hastily glanced over in my solitude: a book of sermons, very high church doctrine. "Do you agree with the opinions in that book?" I asked.

"I should hope so," she answered gravely; "and I trust, so do you."

"My opinions as yet are hardly defined to my own heart, being so young; but I don't think I could agree with the doctrine in that book. Religion is a thing of the heart, not of the senses, or of forms; but do not let us split upon this point, Valerie: I know little of such matters."

"*I* know a great deal," answered my cousin, proudly; "and I feel that much as you, or any one else, may despise forms, they are very essential to our service; but I am very high church, and hope, in time, to make you a convert."

"We are early acquaintances," I answered, "to talk thus seriously; but do

not hope for that, for it can never be. Do you read much? And what reading pleases you most? Do you care for poetry?"

"Not much, I confess, Inez. Byron, I consider the only poet worth reading; but mamma allows me to read but little of that. Nevertheless, I contrive to get through most of it, when she is from home." A reproof rose to my lips; but I repressed it, and merely said:—"I never cared much for his poetry: Tennyson and Wordsworth are my favourites; how exquisite are some parts of the "Excelsior!" and then have you read Tennyson's "Morte d'Arthur," and "Locksley Hall?" indeed in almost all his poems, there is something original, and very beautiful. I have them, if you would like to read them."

"Oh! I have read most of them," answered Valerie, carelessly; "but don't think much of them; as for Wordsworth, I never have patience to read ten lines of it, so dull and insipid do I consider it; but

I plainly foresee that you and Agnes will be found weeping together over—‘The Pet Lamb,’ and ‘Mariana in the Moated Grange,’ she is such a sentimental creature !”

“I thought she was your friend: yet your description of her is not engaging.”

“I am fond of her, notwithstanding,” answered Valerie, colouring: “but we must not talk any more of her, now. There’s mamma coming in; you must go down, presently, and see her. I hope you will like her,” she added, in a sneering tone; “she is never out of temper, my dear. But do you know, Miss Inez, that papa told me just now he admired your appearance, and thought you had turned out a pretty graceful little girl. Do you care much for admiration?”

“I have never received any,” I answered laughing; “but think it would be delightful, to be admired, approved of, and liked.”

“Approved of, and liked, my dear !

that's very moderate. I soar higher ; but I must go now, and will send my maid to assist you." So saying, Valerie left the room.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST impressions are often correct, and my first impression of Mrs. Wentworth was that although hard and haughty in manner, there was more of openness, a daring bold kind of sincerity about her, than in Valerie; a look, as if she would scorn anything mean or treacherous: her beautiful haughty eyes still conveyed to me the idea of truth; her manner rather that of one made worldly by those she had been brought up amongst, and in contact with, than her natural disposition; and I have since found I was not mistaken in this idea.

Still with the traces of great beauty about her, and a figure befitting a queen, tall and majestic, yet I felt no shrinking from or fear of her. She was one, I then thought, whom I could never have dared to speak openly to, but whom I could still entertain an enthusiastic admiration of, perhaps even, in time, love. So I might, had one who stood near when this first passed through my mind, permitted it; but that cold, beautiful blue eye glanced at her mother, then on me, and something in its expression told me she had resolved it *should* not be.

“ You had better go and practise the harp, Valerie,” said Mrs. Wentworth, “ after dinner. Your master tells me you are very idle; I cannot hear of it.”

“ Why do you listen to that stupid man, mamma ?” answered Valerie. “ I practise quite as much as I have time for.”

“ I listen to whom I choose,” answered her mother, “ and it’s my desire you should practise.”

Valerie left the room frowning.

Mrs. Wentworth flung herself on the sofa, and taking a French novel that lay beside her, commenced reading, whilst I, with my work, sat silent near the window.

And I was to live with these people, with whom I felt I had no sympathy, whose feelings were as apart from mine as the roaring cataract, foaming down some mountain headland, is from the still rivulet that flows calmly through some green vale. If sorrow should touch me, where then, I thought, should I fly for help and sympathy? Not to her who lay there, proud and cold, I almost dependent on her bounty; not to the beautiful being whose fingers now swept the chords with a powerful, thrilling touch, in the adjoining room. With near relations I was still alone, and as my work fell from my hands, tears of loneliness coursed each other down my cheeks, burning with suppressed emotion.

The novel had been laid aside, and in a

short time Mrs. Wentworth lay sleeping on the sofa : the harpstrings ceased to vibrate, and Valerie entered. She either did not notice my grief, or did not choose in any way to enquire the cause ; for, merely looking at me inquisitively, she took up the book that Mrs. Wentworth had been perusing, and quickly glanced over its contents ; but at any stir or sound as if to warn her of her mother waking, she placed it in the same spot.

“ Are you not allowed to read novels ? ” I asked.

“ Of course I am. Why should you enquire ? ” she replied. “ Any one would imagine I read by stealth. ”

“ I did not mean to insinuate such a thing, ” I answered, “ but many girls of our age are not ; it would therefore be nothing remarkable if *you* were not. ”

“ I am no longer a child, ” answered Valerie, “ nor do I choose to be treated like one : it is different with you who are

younger ; besides, I have far greater knowledge of life and of the world than you can have : the very life of change and scene I have led would cause that. Dear little Inez, you are so *very young*, and appear to me like one who must have been brought up in some wild, and fed on bread and milk ; but a few months with us will let you into some of the realities of life, my dear."

" I have no wish to be initiated," I replied, " knowledge must bring pain ! it will come soon—too soon !" I added, sighing.

" Come, don't give me a sermon," said Valerie, laughing ; " all realities need not be painful : for my part, I never intend to distress myself about anything, or let misfortunes weigh on me, if they *do come* : enjoyment is what I seek, and what I will have. I wish to be admired and sought after, and to make dozens of poor creatures break their hearts about me, while all the time I am heart-whole and free. You will

see next spring, when I come out, what I shall do ; but alas ! this is only September."

I told her I could not approve of such sentiments, and that perhaps when the long wished for time came she might be disappointed ; but she answered only—

"What a methodist you are to be sure ! depend upon it, Miss Inez, you will be as fond of admiration as anyone else, so don't preach any more, or hereafter I shall bring up this conversation against you."

I smiled and answered, "No doubt she might, and I had no wish either to be a methodist or prude ;" but I don't know how it was, as Valerie and I talked there seemed a jarring and discord of feeling. She seemed to grow weary for awhile ; but coming closer, whispered—

"To-morrow I must take you to see Agnes Wilton : I could tell you such a funny story about her, but it's a profound secret."

"You had better not, then," I answered,

“ not knowing her, I feel no anxiety to be burdened with her private history.”

“ Private history ! that would indeed be long in telling, as she is now quite *passée*, and has been engaged, or fancied herself so, ever so many times, for none of the unfortunate men ever wished to marry her, but merely to flirt and amuse themselves ; but lately she has fallen deeply in love with a young officer in my father’s regiment ; writes to him every day, and I believe has gone so far as almost to propose to him, while he, poor man, thinks of her as his great grandmother ! and the best of the story is, he is in love with *me*, and has proposed for me over and over again. Poor persecuted creature ! no field or lane, however remote, which he endeavours to have a quiet ride or walk in, but Agnes finds him out ; and all the time he is riding in search of me, and whenever he has an opportunity, pours into my ear his unhappiness, and his love for

me, and disgust at Agnes. Oh! it's such fun to hear him."

"This is a strange story," I replied, looking at Valerie, "and one that seems to me both unnatural and painful: how disgusted you must feel at such conduct on her part, and love on his, that you cannot return! The less you see of so strange and forward a girl, the better; and as for taking me to call upon her to-morrow, pray excuse it; I have no wish for such acquaintance."

"Dear me, how particular; but do come once, and *remember*.——"

Just as Valeriè uttered these words Mrs. Wentworth suddenly woke up and bade Valerie ring for tea. She did so, but turned to me with her finger on her lip, in token of silence. I sat silently pondering over what she had told me, fancying I could, in my own mind, sift the truth from the falsehood. Still Miss Wilton might be all she said; but should not her friend have shielded

her from a stranger? or, if she had told me her weakness and failings, shown some sorrow or pity for them, instead of relating them only to ridicule? I judged of her accordingly: treacherous was the word to express her character; and I mourned that so fair a form should contain so much that was evil.

Valerie and I set off the next morning to call on Miss Wilton, and though some years have passed since then, my remembrance of that walk is as vivid as if it were but yesterday. It was a bright morning, towards the end of September, still and warm for the time of year. Our path led through fields, away from the town, divided only by low hedges and fences, in which cattle were feeding, and as we walked quickly by we cast many a disturbed glance towards them, feeling glad when we had passed the danger and had entered the narrow lanes leading to Mrs. Wilton's house. Deep lanes they were, with high banks on either side, and

here and there, at some turning of the road, some grand old forest tree would stand gleaming in the full light, some of its branches green almost as in early summer, whilst others hung soft with yellow autumn tints, mingling with the rich red leaves that were trembling in the breeze and soon would be lying pale and withered on the cold ground. One large hornbeam in particular I stood for some time gazing on in rapt admiration, as it hung over a pool of water belonging to an old farm-house near, till Valerie said,—

“Come, we shall never get there, Inez, if you will stand looking at every old rubbishing tree and pond you pass; what *do* you see to admire in them? you might be a cockney, my dear, fresh from the city, never having before feasted your smoke-dried eyes on green pastures and verdant lanes.”

“I am sorry to have kept you,” I answered with a smile, “but I must own that although

neither a cockney nor immersed in smoke, it does give me very great delight gazing on these things, particularly on so glorious a day as this ; and, remember, it is all new to me."

" Well, I am glad you are so easily amused," she answered, laughing, " and you have my full permission to watch these rare trees and duck-ponds as long as you like, only do not ask me to follow your example ; but I declare, here is Agnes !"

Walking towards us I perceived a girl, apparently about six-and-twenty, not tall, but of a good figure, with a face that was not strikingly pretty, though on closer inspection I noticed marks of real beauty about her, though her complexion was not dazzling in colouring, like my cousin's, or pleasing from animation ; on the contrary, she was pale and rather sallow ; but then, those fine dark eyes were full of feeling, and although too much of sadness was marked upon the high forehead and exquisitely

pencilled eyebrows and drooping lashes, it seemed a face full of interest, and I wondered, as she drew near, that Valerie had not mentioned she was good-looking.

“Dearest Agnes,” said Valerie, stooping to impress affectionate kisses on her friend, “how many days have passed without our meeting! I could wait no longer, and have trudged through fields and lanes and wet grass, passed savage bulls, and everything that is horrible, to come to you. Allow me to introduce my little cousin, Inez, who is come to live with us.”

Miss Wilton looked, as she shook hands with me, as if wondering whether the end of Valerie’s sentence accorded with my wishes, and certainly the words that I was to live with them, were startling and painful.

Walking by their side I listened to their talk, which consisted merely of what had occurred in the few days’ absence; but still it struck me there was a painful constraint in Miss Wilton’s manner towards Valerie,

which she was endeavouring to remove, and a few words, spoken in almost a whisper, made me wonder more and more at every sentence Valerie uttered. I heard her say "Well, Agnes, of course you have seen Mr. Frazer? and how do matters progress? You know, dear, how really anxious I am that it should be settled one way or other;" and then, lowering her voice almost to a whisper, I caught the words, "When I am riding out with papa he comes to pour out his griefs to me, and I do all I can——" but then the words died away, and a sudden breeze springing up prevented my hearing more. But surely I had heard enough to raise my suspicions and to convince me, if I were not already convinced, of Valerie's false-heartedness towards her friend; and I longed so to warn her, to tell her in what a strange, almost improper light she had been painted to me only the evening before, and of the ridicule cast on her and her lover. Yet I then thought *that* time might never

be, and I followed them through the gate leading to Mrs. Wilton's house with a feeling of wonder and of unhappiness.

I found that Agnes Wilton lived with her widowed mother, and that her married brother and his wife were for a time residing with them. They received us kindly, and appeared nice intelligent people. I took a sudden interest in Agnes, who seemed, I thought, unhappy, and I longed to know her better. We remained there to luncheon, Valerie in the highest spirits possible. I was sorry to check her mirth, but remembering my aunt's strict injunction that we should be home by four o'clock, I reminded Valerie of it.

"Very well, we must go, I suppose," she answered, sighing, "but remember, Agnes, I shall expect you to come and see *me* next;" and so saying, and kissing her with apparently great affection, she wished her good-bye, and we returned home.

CHAPTER III.

I cannot, at this distance of time, bring clearly to my mind the events of each day, nor the exact impressions I entertained towards those with whom I was thrown in such close contact. If at *this* period, scenes I *then* witnessed were passing before me daily, I think I should feel a clearer perception of them, and define their separate causes more distinctly. Not that I was ever unobserving: alas! for my own peace of mind I have ever viewed things in too near a light, and scenes and words that many a young light heart would merely have glanced

at and passed on, I thought deeply of, and brooded over. Perhaps our life for many weeks might, by most young girls, have been considered monotonous and stupid, for our days were spent in a general routine ; first, practising with our different masters ; then Valerie usually riding with her father, who seemed, I thought, fond and proud of her, while every now and then Mrs. Wentworth would invite me to drive with her in the open carriage. Oftener, however, I remained at home, and would pace up and down the long gravel walks of the quiet back garden in solitude ; and I enjoyed these walks more than the drives. My aunt's cold manner chilled me ; it seemed as though she treated both me and Valerie as mere school-girls who ought to have no ideas of our own, or if we had, to keep them closely to ourselves. I seldom, therefore, addressed her, and when I did, spoke of the slight every-day occurrences that passed before me ; yet I would sometimes, for minutes together, gaze on

her full dark eyes and speaking face, as she leant back in her carriage.

One still afternoon in October, as we drove slowly along together, I sometimes glancing on the masses of yellow foliage and then on her still handsome face in silence, she asked quickly, almost angrily :

“ Inez, what a trick you have of fixing your eyes on peoples’ faces. Why do you stare at me so? I declare it’s quite disagreeable.”

“ I beg your pardon, aunt,” I answered, flushing to my very temples, “ I don’t think I stare in general ; but I admire *you*.”

The latter part of my speech was hastily uttered, and repented of as soon, for I feared offending her. She did not reply instantly, but after pausing for some time she said—

“ You admire me, do you? Strange, in so young a girl, almost a child, as you are ; young people of your age would think when beauty was on the wane it was no longer

interesting; when the roses and lilies had gone for ever. I could quite understand your admiring Valerie, with her fair young face, matchless complexion, golden hair, and sweet full lips: you doubtless do admire her, do you not?"

"Yes, *extremely*," I answered, "there seems, as you say, nothing wanting, and *yet*——"

"Yet what?" said Mrs. Wentworth, rising up and examining my face minutely.

"I was going to add that I admire you *more*."

"This is strange!" she answered, her lips parting with a radiant smile, and entirely losing the cold compressed expression that usually closed them. "This is very strange! Valerie not being quite eighteen, *I*, thirty-eight! but did I say," she continued, "that in Valerie there was nothing wanting? if so, I do not remember it."

"No! but you talked admiringly of her, and with justice," I replied.

“ Then why do you admire me more ? ”

“ Because—because,” I stammered, “ I think there is more—— ”

“ I will finish your sentence for you ; ” she added. “ There is more soul and truth in my face than in her’s : it may not be rich in colouring, or sweet in expression, but you *trust* it more, though you do not love me : is it not so, child ? ”

“ Yes ! ” I answered, “ you have guessed my thoughts, certainly. ”

“ Strange ! ” sighed Mrs. Wentworth, as if musing to herself, “ strange, you should have felt this too, you, so young and inexperienced ! ”

“ I have perhaps no right to think so, aunt, and I will dismiss it from my thoughts as soon as possible. ”

When I looked up I found that Mrs. Wentworth was weeping bitterly. She, the cold, usually composed and haughty woman, was weeping. It was not like common grief ; it seemed like an indulgence of some long-

borne suppressed anguish, that a few slight words had touched the chord of. I took her hand, pressing it in silence, while she said :—

“ Don’t distress yourself, Inez, about me, but promise to love me, though I am proud and cold. You have an enthusiasm of character that pleases me. Listen, child, to what I say: let no one rob you of it, or harden your heart. Remember what I say.”

Just as she uttered these words her husband and Valerie came cantering up to the side of the carriage. Valerie flushed with the exercise, while her beautiful tresses played with the wind. I looked admiringly at her as she described the ride they had been, till she glanced at her mother’s face, which still bore the traces of tears, then at me, with a severe searching look, and whipping her horse, rode off quickly, while we drove home in silence.

My uncle and aunt dined out that evening, and Valerie and I sat together in the

drawing-room, talking. After some time she asked :—

“ What was the matter to-day when we met you? Had you and mamma had a battle ?”

“ No !” I answered, “ we are very good friends, and aunt is never unkind.”

“ Oh ! never, of course !” answered Valerie ; “ but, pray, what was the matter ?”

“ I cannot tell you, for indeed I scarcely know,” I replied.

“ Rather say you don’t choose to tell me,” answered Valerie, “ for you must know what you were talking about ; besides, I saw traces of tears on mamma’s face : papa even noticed it. You cannot deceive me ; and if you were speaking of, or conjuring up any stories against *me*, I shall not forgive it in a hurry : your refusing to relate what passed looks extremely like it.”

“ Before you thus censure me you should have cause, Valerie. Did I say or hint that I spoke to my aunt against you ? You hastily

rush at this conclusion without any ground for doing so : your words are both hasty and unjust."

"Hasty and unjust, am I?" she said, glowing with rage : "I should like to know what you mean by daring thus to speak to me : let me tell you, Miss Inez, you are not to be mistress *here*. I have seen for some time the influence you are gaining with mamma. As you refuse to tell me your conversation, I shall think and believe you were canvassing, and perhaps even disparaging something in my conduct or manners."

She sat, her cold, clear light eyes fixed on me ; her colour burning on her fair cheeks ; and as I looked on her I thought her very beauty served as an index to her mind.

"Now," I said, "in reply to your taunts be it known that your appearance was alone discussed, and *that* in terms of admiration. The grief shown by my aunt I can in no

way account for, nor do I ever pry into others' secrets when I clearly perceive they have no wish to confide them to my keeping. Are you satisfied now?" I asked.

"No! far from it," answered Valerie; "Do you think any sensible rational being could believe such a statement, that merely talking of my beauty would cause sorrow and tears; folly! folly! I am not thus to be taken in. What did you say of me? for I *will* hear."

I paused for a few instants to weigh in my own mind what the effects might be of telling truthfully, word for word, what was spoken, for although nothing had been said positively against Valerie, and merely the expression of her face commented on, she might construe it differently, and cause me much unhappiness in consequence: still, my silence would raise her suspicion, and *that* once raised, where would she stop?

Simply, word for word, I related our conversation, not either exaggerating or de-

tracting from the plain bare facts. When I had concluded, a fixed expression of concentrated rage and hatred rested on me, like a spirit of evil exulting over a fallen foe: her words came sparingly, in their cold bitter sarcasm.

“Want of soul and truth! You are a good judge of character, I should think, a school-girl, very young and verdant, my dear, from my observation of you! I have silently watched your manœuvring to supplant me in my mother’s affection. You will not succeed; I wish you joy of your future *here*, my dear, and you shall know what it is to say I am soulless and untruthful. Good night!” and waving her hand she moved towards the door.

“Valerie!” I cried, earnestly, “come back, I pray, if but for a single instant;” but looking fully at me, she slammed to the door, and as she mounted the staircase a low laugh reached my ear.

Like one who, after vainly struggling

amid wild waves and billows to reach some shore, however bleak and lonely, at length sinks deeper and deeper 'mid closing waters, gathering dark as death, so I bent down my head and wept.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE are some, who, in their first bitter anger, heap at once coals of fire on their victim's head. Not so Valerie. The poison she administered was not instantaneous in its effect, or given in large portions ; but slowly and surely. It was measured forth daily, till its effects were diffused through my system, unnerving and weakening my mind and body. So gradually did she set to work, that as we practised together, morning after morning, it seemed to me that any remembrance on her part of our quarrel on the night I have dilated on, had

died from her recollection. When I begged an explanation, she replied, she had hoped it was forgotten : people, when out of temper, seldom knew or remembered what they said or did ; and she entreated that no further allusion might be made. Too happy to thus let matters rest, I quietly acquiesced. It was my aunt's manner first caused me to think all was not right ; and that Valerie's apparent friendship was assumed ; not that she spoke ; only her usual reserve seemed more plainly shown, her manner colder than before ; and often on my return from a walk or drive with her, with silent uncomplaining regret for her loss of confidence in me, I would shed some of the bitterest tears I have ever known. My uncle, too, who, on my first coming, had usually a kind word or a kiss for me when I met him of an evening, now seldom addressed me, and looked, I thought, with a suspicious eye on every word and action, while he would sit with his arm round Valerie, and form plans

for her future happiness and gaiety. His every thought and hope seemed centred in that beautiful girl, who, I perceived, had power and cunning enough to lead him which way it pleased her best; while his wife would sit by apparently unconcerned, silent and proud; but, now and then, I noticed that tears would stand in those radiant feeling eyes: tears, they seemed to me, of unrequited affection; shipwrecked hopes; and deep-rooted pride and unhappiness. A strange enigma did she then appear! Why did she, I then thought, shrink from and dislike the only one who would have loved and helped her? I did not *then* see, that those who have for years and years neither gained nor placed confidence in others, and who have borne wrongs and griefs in a proud, calm endurance, do not *suddenly* feel trust in others: perhaps, for this reason:—that as they know more of human nature, they feel the insufficiency of worldly friendships; and how few there are,

in whom we can place confidence. Thus the heart becomes hard and deadened to any appeal for affection. So it was with the beautiful and richly endowed Mrs. Wentworth. Yet, at that time, this was to me, a sealed book. I did not know how her life had passed; I was too young to dwell much, or for any time together, on what passed around me, or to endeavour to define the causes.

As our days passed, and few events marked them, I at least hoped that peace and rest would be allotted me: and although coldness of manner, and almost neglect was shown me, I tried to be content, and even happy; not long was I destined for even that slight share of rest.

One day as I came suddenly into the drawing-room, I found Valerie in tears, and looking much agitated and angry, while Mrs. Wentworth's face wore an expression of, to say the least, distress and annoyance.

"Well, Valerie," I heard her say; "I

hope you speak the truth *now*. I forgive you again and again; and have done so for years; yet you know what I have borne from you—" but on my sudden entrance, the words died on her lips, and Valerie ran quickly past me. How I longed then to go to my aunt, and comfort her, and beg her to feel more kindly towards me for the future; but she remained sitting there, hardly for awhile seeming to notice my presence, till, at length, she said:—" Have you ever seen a Mr. Frazer since you came here?"

" Yes. The first day I arrived, he came into the room with my uncle and Valerie."

" And has he ever been mentioned to you since, by her?" asked my aunt. I brought to my remembrance the conversation about Agnes Wilton; but, supposing I had been told this in confidence, I merely replied:—" Yes, I have heard her mention him, but not lately."

" What did she say about him?" asked

Mrs. Wentworth, "tell me truthfully what you remember: I know how difficult it is to recall exactly, words of which we, perhaps, take little heed at the time they are spoken. But if you *could* recollect, I should feel obliged."

I paused, colouring, and then said:—"Perhaps, Valerie would not like my repeating any little gossip she tells me when we are alone."

Mrs. Wentworth looked fully into my face, an enquiring anxious pitying look, while she answered:—

"You are right, Inez: in general, never repeat what has been said in confidence, or, though perhaps not actually in confidence, told with the idea of its not being repeated. But I am your aunt, and Valerie my daughter; therefore, for many reasons, I must again entreat that you will answer me one question. I have been cold to you, and feel I cannot expect to gain your confidence or love."

“ Oh ! Aunt ! ” I exclaimed, interrupting her, and moving towards her, while tears forced their way down my burning cheeks : “ do not say so : I could love you, if you would but think so.” The earnestness of my manner strangely moved her : she actually pressed me near her and kissed me. I am sure no girl ever more valued the first kiss of love, than I did that one kiss from *her* : and from that time, I loved her. In one moment she was still and proud, to all outward appearance as ever, telling me I should not suffer from Valerie in consequence of what I might tell her, and begging me to begin. As well as I could remember, then, I repeated Valerie’s words. With a sort of breathless impatience she listened ; and when I came to the part where Valerie had declared, that though Mr. Frazer was considered Agnes Wilton’s lover, he was really hers ; and had declared it in their rides, she turned white as death ; while her lips seemed to speak, though no words issued from them.

"Thank you, Inez," she said, in a low voice of misery, "for telling me the *truth*; she has endeavoured of late, to prevent my caring for you, and had well nigh succeeded, child. This must be prevented, though," she murmured, as she left the room.

That evening, Valerie told me, that when I found her so agitated in the morning, her mother was doubting the reality of a painful story she had been telling her; of a friend of whom she had once been truly fond; "I thought I would tell you," she continued; "for you must have thought it so strange."

I listened to her falsehood in silence.

Certainly, my aunt's manner changed from that day, and softened towards me. Many young people of my age might have deemed it cold, and even repelling: but I felt there was real affection at her heart, through many a fold of cold reserve and pride; and that she, at all events, put confidence in me, and believed me: while Valerie watched me narrowly for some days,

as though she feared I was again taken into favour. Once or twice she whispered something in my uncle's ear, as we all sat together of an evening, while he would look at her with such an expression of pity and affection, as she would turn from him, with a distracted air, and sigh heavily, like one suffering from some deep injury. I would often retire to my own room, to escape being thus watched and suspected by them : and was ruminating there, alone, one evening, when my uncle's voice, loud and authoritative, summoned me to the drawing-room, where Valerie, as I had once before seen her, stood kindling and vibrating with rage before my uncle.

"Now, Inez," he said harshly, turning to me, "if it is *you* who have told untruths of Valerie, confess it instantly!"

"I have spoken no word falsely," I answered, fixing my eyes on his face.

"You have," interrupted Valerie; "I know it is *you* who have thus insinuated

yourself into mamma's good graces; and repeated, or rather invented and fabricated stories against me." I looked straight at Mrs. Wentworth, and read in her expression, she had not betrayed me.

"Stop all this folly and crying," commanded my uncle, "and tell us plainly, Valerie, has Mr. Frazer ever made love to you? for if so, I vow I have not noticed anything: he shall quickly be made to answer for it, if he has; the presumptuous puppy!"

"He never has," boldly declared Valerie, "nor have I ever said so to any one; certainly not to *you*," she continued, fiercely, turning towards me.

"Valerie," I said, "*remember!*"

"Remember what?" she answered, "I would take Heaven to witness I never spoke of Mr. Frazer to you, except as being Agnes Wilton's lover: I could swear it!"

"Hush, Valerie; an oath is a solemn thing: perhaps you have forgotten your

words: they were spoken lightly, and without thought."

"They were never spoken at *all*," she replied; "pure invention of yours from beginning to end. When I am so maligned, will no one come forward to help or believe me? is not my word as good as that treacherous girl's?" she added, pointing to me, "who thus slanders me to my own parents?"

"Who said she did so?" asked Mrs. Wentworth.

"She acknowledges it herself," answered Valerie, "declaring I said things which never passed my lips, nor entered my thoughts."

"*I* believe Valerie," said my uncle; "and as for *you*," he continued, turning towards me frowning terribly, "you are my niece, and I your guardian: so take charge of you I must, under my roof you must remain. If not, never should you enter these doors again, false cruel-hearted girl,

that you are : thus to prove your gratitude for all our kindness—Go !” he exclaimed, angrily, while drawing his beautiful Valerie to his heart, he kissed and soothed her.

“ Yes, I shall go,” I answered calmly ; but I own with pride the words were spoken : “ yes, I will leave your house this very hour : poor, unprotected, as I am, and an orphan. Still, I would rather beg my bread, than remain under your roof.”

I ran from the room. I have no recollection how or when I reached my own ; but, on opening my eyes, a form was near me, bathing my hands and cold damp brow. It was Mrs. Wentworth. She alone, amid all that household, knew or cared what became of me in my solitary wretchedness. I raised myself up, and looked at her for an instant in a maze of bewilderment, trying to remember where I was. Slowly, painfully, did the scene I had just witnessed come back to me ; and, with a despairing voice, I said,—“ Oh ! let me go ! I said

within an hour I would leave this house. *Nothing* shall keep me."

"Yes, I will keep you, Inez : you *shall* not go."

"Do you then," I answered, "not despise me? do you not think like the rest, that I am false and cruel?"

"You are truth, itself, child: why should you fear any mortal? Stay here: while I live, I will protect you." Weeping, I went and kissed her; but what was THAT I now saw, causing my faintness to return, my cheeks and lips growing cold and pale with horror? The delicate white cambric handkerchief, that, while I had spoken, she had pressed to her mouth, was stained with bright scarlet blood. "Oh! God! What do I see?" I cried, "I have killed you."

"Don't be alarmed," she answered gently, "at a few spots of blood: it is not an uncommon occurrence with me now: the slightest agitation causes it."

“ But you must be very ill,” I said, interrupting her; “ do have advice instantly.”

“ Advice?” she answered; “ nothing will save me now: stay here quietly, I am going to lie down for some hours; but when my husband and Valerie go out to-morrow for their ride, come to my room: I would speak to you *alone*,” and so saying, she glided from the apartment.

CHAPTER V.

THE next afternoon was bright and beautiful ; but, as I entered Mrs. Wentworth's room, the sunshine struggled faintly, with a subdued and softened light, through the crimson damask curtains that were shadowing her. There she lay, still and beautiful in her sleep, her head thrown back, and the long dark braids of hair, escaping from the comb that confined them, falling in luxuriant masses over the pillow ; her dark lashes fringing her pale slight face, which she leaned against an arm and hand that I have never seen equalled. I could not re-

frain from contrasting her with Valerie. If *she* had lain there in her gorgeous beauty, my eyes would not have rested as they now did, in wrapt silent admiration. No, Valerie was almost hateful to me ; her very beauty distasteful and repelling.

Watching silently, and hardly daring to breathe, lest I should disturb her slumber, I saw her wake suddenly and look at me.

“Inez,” she exclaimed, “why did you let me sleep? I have much to say, and little time to say it in.”

“I was glad to find you sleeping,” I answered, “and, indeed, I think you should not talk, ill as you are.”

“Speaking quietly to you will not hurt me, Inez. Come near me, young girl, listen to me. I should like to help and warn you, for life is a hard struggle from beginning to end.”

“I can believe that,” I answered.

“No, you cannot feel it,” said Mrs. Wentworth, “it is mere theory with you ;

but for one thing, child, be thankful, that I did not bring you up. What would you have been now? like—ah! never mind,” she continued, with an hysterical laugh, “whom you might have resembled; I am only thankful you are saved.”

“Do not agitate yourself so, aunt, nor think of me; believe me, I have never thought you unkind.”

“I have been,” she answered: “each fault of mine, and they are many, is as clearly before me now as though it were written *there*. In my youth I never checked or subdued my evil inclinations: no wonder, then, I became hardened and indifferent. My temper, which has always been violent, was never restrained or corrected. My invulnerable pride was rather approved of than humbled; and at fifteen I was as fair a specimen of a spoilt beauty as I suppose the world ever looked upon. My father died of consumption soon after my birth; and Charlotte, my only sister, and I were left

entirely with a mother, whose only thought was to have us well educated and good-looking. With small means we struggled on, first in one watering place, then in another. Charlotte married soon and *well*, and so satisfied my mother's aim and object, and at sixteen I was launched into life without one principle of right to guide me; one spark of religious feeling to restrain my evil nature. The beautiful Florence Dennison was the belle of every assembly; the toast at every supper-party and banquet. Men spoke of me as a fine handsome girl, with plenty of spirit; and women as that abominable flirt! One day my mother informed me that a nephew of hers was coming to stay some weeks with us; 'but remember, Florence,' she added, 'he is very poor, and in bad health, so do not be fool enough to flirt with him.' 'What did I want,' I answered, 'with a poor sick cousin, when half the world was admiring me?' Yet, Inez, Edmund Hastings was the only one

who ever influenced me to good, who ever reproved my glaring faults and worldly spirit; and," continued Mrs. Wentworth, bending down her head as she spoke, "with a feeling of shame do I confess it—the only being I ever truly cared for. He loved me with that enduring love which outlives all other feeling; and, strange to say, though I hated his reproofs and ridiculed his religion and goodness, I, alas! loved him, engaged myself to him, unknown to my mother, and would have married him if I could; but on my mother discovering the fact of our engagement, nothing could exceed her rage, and hurrying me away from him, and rendering me as unhappy as it was in her power to do, she took me to Brighton for the winter. I think my anger and scorn at her treatment of me must have caused her much discomfort, to say the least of it; and she must have been glad when fortune threw Major Wentworth in my path. He was still young, very handsome, with nine hundred

a-year and brilliant prospects. Cleverly she set to work, and by management and manœuvring, soon caused him to throw himself at my feet. With all my faults, meanness, and manœuvring of any kind, I hated ; my pride revolted against it, and I refused him. I saw plainly that he did not love me ; that it was merely from vanity and longing to win what so many poorer than himself loved in vain, that he so persevered in his suit. He would take no refusal, and after many weeks of various conflicting feelings, a marriage was concluded between two people equally at heart indifferent to each other ; one from a deep affection for another, which was miserable as it was misplaced ; the other from mere ignorance of the true character of her whom he had chosen. I was then exquisitely beautiful, and all eyes rested on me with pleasure. Ah ! Inez, now the vanity of all that is past and gone, and I lie here, pale, wasted, and dying ! I may

tell you this ; Valerie is beautiful ; but look here—does she equal this ?”

She drew aside a curtain, and then a picture met my view ; as a vision it came on me. A figure, tall, graceful, and dignified ; a face so exquisite in proportion, so radiant in colouring, that I grew dazzled, and stood transfixed with wonder and admiration, while Mrs. Wentworth’s voice drew me to earth again, as she laughingly remarked—

“ My dear, I did not ask you to worship me.”

“ You could not have needed asking,” I replied : “ all must have bowed to beauty such as yours, matchless indeed !”

Taking one more look at the dark waving hair, deep exquisite hazel eyes, as they seemed to look lovingly down on me, I reluctantly drew the curtain, and took my place beside the reality, who resumed her story.

“ A year after our marriage the regiment was ordered to india. My husband, if *I* had desired it, would have sold out of the army ; but I saw that he cared for his profession, and was on the point of being promoted in it, so I decided on going. The idea of India pleased me : new scenes, new faces, were what I longed for. If I had no real happiness I must have excitement. Accordingly we sailed. Pleased, courted, flattered, and followed wherever I appeared, my husband naturally felt proud of me, and all the rarest gifts and jewels were bestowed on one who, alas ! lived but on the adulation that was daily, hourly administered. Oh ! Inez, I look back on those years with horror and disgust. No real affection did I give him to whom I was bound for life ; no sort of duty was attended to ; no prayer for pardon was breathed to heaven ; no remorse for what I had done touched my heart or awakened my conscience. Soulless, vain, and unthinking I passed on in my pride

and loveliness. My little Valerie was a beautiful infant, and I loved her truly, for in every mother's heart there must beat some pure and holy love for a child. Yet, how have I been rewarded? I ought not to expect reward where I inculcated no principle of right. Affection I lavished on her; but alas! it fell on arid soil; oh! that I should have to speak thus of my only child! but there are some," continued Mrs. Wentworth, "whom no affection touches; whose hearts never respond to true feeling. I was sinful, proud, and self-willed; but I had *feeling*. Oh! that those I dwelt amongst had directed it rightly! but regret for the days which never will come back is fruitless as vain. I will strive to improve the present, for the future may not be mine."

She stopped, for a slight cough checked her speaking, and she lay back exhausted, whilst I in tears watched her silently. A noise in the passage roused her.

"Go!" she cried, earnestly, "and listen.

What I have now revealed is known but to you ; for the few months I may live keep it sacred : the next time you look on me I shall be the same cold, unimpassioned Mrs. Wentworth that each day you have looked on with fear and wonder."

In silence I left her ; but as I gave one lingering look, she felt its truth and was satisfied.

" I thought you were to leave us within an hour," said Valerie, interrupting me as I passed her with my bonnet on.

" I yielded my inclination to do so," I replied coldly, " to my aunt's entreaty and command : for *her* sake I remain."

" Dear me ! what heroism and self-denial !" replied Valerie, with a sneer, " particularly as you have so many relations and friends whom you could go to at any moment, and plenty of money at your disposal ! really I have seldom seen any niece so loving and obedient."

" Your sarcasms fall unheeded," I re-

plied, "for they are beneath my notice. It is true I have neither relations nor friends, and little money of my own; yet, let me tell you, that were it not for the love I bear your mother, I would sooner beg or starve than remain here in your presence; you who, so young in years, are old in treachery and falsehood."

I left her and passed into the garden: there (my cheeks burning, and my whole frame trembling with agitation,) I paced rapidly to and fro. The air revived me, and after a while its soothing influence calmed my troubled spirit. I continued to walk up and down, till at length, wearied more from grief than exercise, I leaned against the gate (which opened into a lane at the back of the house,) and wept. I was startled by hearing a step, and looking up I saw Agnes Wilton coming towards me. Hastily drying my tears and drawing my veil over my face, I went forward to meet her.

She came up, saying, she supposed Valerie was out riding, or I should not be there, musing over the gate alone.

I told her, no! that Valerie was in the drawing-room, if she wished to see her.

“Presently,” she answered, “but just now I will take a turn with you in the lanes, if you like.”

Gladly agreeing to it, I walked for some time with her, talking, when Agnes asked why Valerie and I were not more together.

“It seems strange,” she said, “that you are left so *entirely* to yourself, as you appear to *me* a companionable little creature. I can’t quite make it out.”

“It must seem so to you,” I answered, “but if you knew——”

“If I knew Valerie, you were going to say,” answered Agnes hastily. “Perhaps I know her better than you do.”

“Impossible!” I replied, “or you would not be her friend: no, you cannot know her as I do.”

“ You are very young,” she answered, sighing, “ and have not yet learnt how necessary it is, sometimes, to bear with people patiently, though they cause us anxiety and unhappiness. She is your cousin, remember, and circumstances oblige you to be continually in her society : in all probability, too, most of your life will be spent with her. Would it not be better to bear with her faults and endeavour to be friends ?”

“ Ah ! Miss Wilton,” I answered, sadly “ your advice is kindly meant, and, if possible, should be followed. Faults of temper I could pass over, for all have failings, and my own are prominent ; but there are other reasons, which if I were to acquaint you with, I should feel I was acting wrongly ; reasons to which I hope you may be long a stranger.”

“ Do you think I love Valerie as I once did ?” enquired Miss Wilton : “ No, no ! *Once*,” she continued, “ I loved her with a

passionate fondness: I fancied her mind was as lovely as her face; that love and truth dwelt there; and when I found that I was miserably deceived, I felt all that you, with quicker perceptions, have discovered in a few weeks. Over and over again has she been false to me, and I have forgiven her. She has promised to behave differently for the future, and I trust she may. I am perhaps wrong in asking," she continued, "but in what light did she place me to you? was it your impression she cared for me?"

"Since I came here," I answered, "I have brought much misery on myself by repeating her words, even though at my aunt's express command. You will not wonder, then, if I refuse your request."

"I almost guessed what made you unhappy before you spoke," said Agnes, whose face grew pale as ashes while she spoke. "Strange!" she murmured, "every one she approaches——" but turning round, she added, "You are quite right not to

repeat what she said. Why did I believe her? I talk to you to endeavour to live amicably with her, because I know it would ensure your happiness; and it would be better policy to try and make her care for you: but for *me*, I can only tell you I am most unhappy, and even at this present time I fear she is deceiving me. Some day we shall be better acquainted, I hope, when I will tell you a great deal; in the meantime try and live as quietly as you can: I know it is the only way to ensure you any degree of peace, and though I could never dive deep enough into the cold, proud Mrs. Wentworth, she has spoken kindly of you to me. I believe there is feeling and truth at heart with *her*, therefore you need not despair."

"There is, indeed!" I answered, "and she has been extremely kind to me. Oh! that all could know her as I do! I fear she is very ill. Have you not observed how delicate she looks?"

“ I have long noticed it,” answered Agnes, “ and only wonder that Colonel Wentworth and Valerie do not see it.”

We had now reached the door, and leaving Valerie and Agnes together, I went to my room, and forgot my troubles in an interesting book that Mrs. Wentworth had left on my table.

CHAPTER VI.

I PONDERED over Agnes Wilton's advice daily, feeling the wisdom and truth of her argument, yet fancying it would engender a kind of deceit if my manner towards Valerie were to assume a different character, whilst in my heart I disliked her, and felt nothing but contempt for her conduct. And then came another thought. My uncle was not the only one who had authority over me—my other guardian—where was he? I longed, for a season, for any change of scene, as at least preferable to the quiet endurance of cold asperity from

my uncle, and sneering and cruelty from Valerie. Yet, one affection would have chained me there ; one deep interest in *her* whom each day I saw fading before her time : yet so slowly, that it seemed like the fading of twilight, stealing gradually over a calm beautiful landscape, till, at length, when darkness comes, veiling it from our sight, we mourn that we did not prize it more, when, full of light and life, we had perhaps passed on unheeding. Yes, I saw her droop and languish by slow but sure degrees ; yet, unnoticed and unloved she passed ! Now and then, when a low hollow cough reached my uncle's ear, he would say :—" You have caught cold, Florence, driving in the open carriage : now winter has set in, you should be more careful." And she would answer coldly :—" It will not make much difference ; but I will order the close carriage to-morrow, if it should be cold : " then she would look at *me* with that look I have so often noticed in those that

know their end is near, while I would hurry from the room to hide my grief. If I lost her, what would life be? She, whom each day, I would watch as carefully as a mother watches a dying child; lingering near her, waiting for the faintest smile, or slightest caress. With what joy did I gather the few pale winter flowers to place on her table! or hail the sunshine that enabled her to breath and enjoy the air. Silent and unhappy each day found me; and I determined to ascertain from Valerie if she thought her mother in any danger. Surely the unnatural brightness of those splendid eyes, the brilliant hectic glow on her cheek, could not be mistaken for a sign of health! Yet, it might be; and as we sat working together, one morning, I said:—

“I cannot help feeling very anxious about my aunt, I fear she is in a delicate state of health.”

“Why, her cough is much better,” answered Valerie: “before you came, she

used to cough incessantly : now, she seldom coughs ; and has such a beautiful colour on her face ! you really frighten me to death, the way you talk ! why should you think her worse ?”

“ I only said, I feared,” I answered, while tears rolled down my face, as I spoke, “ do you not observe how weak she is becoming each day ?”

“ Yes,” answered Valerie, “ I know that living so long in India, undermined her naturally good constitution : and perhaps the cold air of this country affects her chest. I declare,” she continued, rising up, “ you have made me miserable ; and I shall go instantly to Papa, and ask him if my mother is dying of consumption, which you seem to hint.”

“ Pray don’t,” I answered, “ I trust your mother may soon be better : you will alarm my uncle ; indeed, you will.”

“ Oh ! it’s very well for you to speak thus coldly,” she replied, and rushing past

me, she ran to the library, where my uncle was reading.

I followed her. She repeated, with much exaggeration, my words, saying:—"Really if my mother is dying, I don't see why it should be kept a secret from *me*." My uncle turned deadly pale, whilst he endeavoured to sooth Valerie; then noticing my tears, a look of pity rested on me for an instant; but in an agitated voice, he bade us both leave him; and, as if some sudden thought flashed on him, he took up his hat and left the room, whilst I endeavoured to cheer Valerie, expressing regret for having perhaps frightened her unnecessarily and unintentionally.

I then retired to my room to watch if my uncle had gone to the doctor's, which I strongly suspected to be the case. And soon, in seemingly close conversation, they walked slowly up and down the road opposite my window. I watched them anxiously: it seemed to me that the words they then

uttered, would seal the doom of her I so truly loved. Alas! from that day, my silent long-concealed fears were, for the first time, confirmed, by those who had mistaken the absence of the cough, and the bright colour, for renewed health; while all the time she was sinking into the grave, uncomplaining and unnoticed. When we all assembled at dinner that evening, my uncle's face wore a strange troubled expression: he would look into Mrs. Wentworth's face with an anxiety and despair strongly depicted. It seemed to me, as if, for the first time, he felt that he might have prized and cherished more, one who might have made the happiness of his life, not merely the bright ornament of society, for whom he felt pride, but no love. Alas! that he should have found that out too late!

CHAPTER VII.

It was now December, three months having passed since I became an inmate of my uncle's house, and a few mornings after the painful decision on Mrs. Wentworth's state of health, which was pronounced by her medical man to be in a most precarious condition. I entered her room and found her alone. She was lying, pale and exhausted, on the sofa, and said, as I came up to her:—

“Inez, are you prepared to take a long journey? for I am ordered to the south of France, and we are to leave this in a fortnight.”

“ I trust it may do you good ;” I answered ; “ if so, the longest and most tiresome journey would amply repay us ; but I can only think of it with pleasure, and shall delight in going abroad.”

“ Seymour has long wished to leave the army,” said my aunt. “ He is very well off now, and at his father’s death will come into the estate. He would have sold out long ago but for me. I felt he needed active pursuits, and something to divert his mind.”

“ I have often wondered,” I replied, “ at my uncle remaining so long in the army, when he was quite rich enough to have settled down in some beautiful country place, and have been happy.”

“ He would not have been happy,” interrupted Mrs. Wentworth : “ it requires similarity of taste and disposition to live a quiet country life ; that, alas ! he could not feel with *me*. Naturally reserved, proud, and passionate, I was not calculated to shine

in such a sphere. Had I married one I loved, with such love as I am *capable* of feeling; one who would have cared sufficiently for me to have borne with my imperious will, I might have made him happy; but *that* not being the case, we have pursued the best course. Inez, when I am dead will you comfort them? bid Valerie be open, truthful, and sometimes think of the world whither I shall *soon* go: tell her I never thought or prayed *once*; borne along by the world's tide, its enjoyments and its follies, I did not think of death. It has come now."

Endeavouring to be calm in her presence I stifled my sobs, but shuddered, as I saw what the slightest excitement now caused, and entreated her to be calm, for every wish of hers should be attended to.

Valerie now entering the room, I thought it best to leave them together, and was going to take my usual quiet walk, when my uncle, entering the room, said:—

“ Inez, I will drive you in the phaeton to see Miss Wilton, if you like, as Valerie is going to remain with her mother this afternoon. You can stay at the Wiltons for an hour, while I go on to see some friends, and I will call for you as I come back.”

Readily agreeing to so pleasant a plan, we were soon driving rapidly through the cold frosty air.

My uncle's manner was kinder than usual ; perhaps grief—at the prospect of losing one, whom, however estranged from, however displeased with, he still cared for—had made him at last feel for others. He talked of our plans for the future, and seemed to cling to the hope that the warm air of a southern clime would restore his wife's health, and that in the ensuing spring Valerie would make her first appearance in London.

How futile often are our plans ; how vain and almost presumptuous the slightest trifles

prove, as well as the weightier matters we ponder over and arrange. In a fortnight we were expecting to leave. We little knew, as we drove that morning, discussing our future, how that future would be passed.

My uncle, leaving me at the Wiltons', drove quickly on, whilst I, entering the house, found Agnes alone. Her face always wore an expression of melancholy, except when amused ; but on this occasion a look of serious annoyance rested on it.

I related the distressing news of Mrs. Wentworth's state of health, which she appeared to feel much, at the same time telling me that she, like myself, had for some time noticed her altered look and weakened condition.

" You all leave in a fortnight ? " she added : " I am sorry to lose you so soon. I had hoped we should have become better acquainted," and then, with some confusion in her tone and manner, she asked—" Have

you, among the many officers you must see at your uncle's, ever met a Mr. Frazer; a tall, good-looking young man?"

"Yes!" I answered, "but I have really borne so much from mentioning this Mr. Frazer, that his very name is disagreeable to me."

"Why, has Valerie ever spoken of him to you, or told you I was engaged to him?"

"I hope you will not think me unkind or rude," I answered, "but indeed I will never again repeat what she tells me."

Agnes paused for some instants, growing paler and paler; then she said:—

"I will tell you why I ask: when your uncle first came here, I was often at their house, and there met Mr. Frazer, who paid me great attention, in time won my affections, and I engaged myself to him, perhaps a foolish engagement, for he was not well off, but he urged it so, telling me that although not then in good circumstances, his prospects were good. I told Valerie

this, who promised to keep my secret, and appeared pleased at my confiding in her. After a great deal of persuasion my friends agreed to it, and I was more happy than I had supposed I could have been."

"Then what," I asked, "makes you *now* look so sad? and why is he not oftener with you? I never see you together."

"*That* I cannot tell you, nor do I know the real cause. For the first few weeks we were engaged he was never happy but in my society. Gradually, however, so gradually at first that I scarcely noticed the change, he has ceased to come as he used to do; has grown cold and absent in manner, like one who is struggling to overcome some feeling that he will not express. I cannot make out the cause, and have implored of Valerie, who has lately become intimate with him, to try and solve the mystery. She says he appears unhappy, and she can only make out from his manner that he is changed, and avoids speaking of

me. This is what she tells me," continued Agnes, " but alas ! I cannot put confidence in Valerie. I know her thirst for admiration is so great that she can never bear to see any other woman loved or admired. Young as she is, hardly out of the schoolroom, she is so vain that even if she had no liking for the man herself, yet the pride of supplanting another, so flattering to self-love, would afford her infinite satisfaction. To her friend, nay, even to a sister, had she possessed one, would she have shown no mercy. Still I had hoped she was changed, and alas ! I placed my trust in her. Can you deny, Inez, that my suppositions have some foundation ?"

She looked at me, whilst I, silent and tearful, stood like one transfixed with pain at her recital.

" You will not tell me, then," said Agnes ; " but your silence is information enough. Oh ! Valerie ! Valerie ! how much have you cost me !" she continued, while a burst of

grief followed that made my heart ache to witness. All I could do was to endeavour to console her, as best I might, and promise her that I would watch Mr. Frazer and Valerie that evening, as I had heard that he and three other officers were to dine at my uncle's.

“ Promise me that you will !” and kissing me as I got into the carriage, she whispered, “ Remember !”

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. WENTWORTH not being well enough to sit at the head of her table, Valerie took her place. I sat next Mr. Frazer; very ill at ease he seemed, and out of spirits. Every now and then glancing towards Valerie, while she, by turns flushed and pale, looked equally confused, though not unhappy. My uncle was naturally out of spirits, and the dinner passed slowly and stupidly.

After we left the dining-room Valerie remained a short time in her mother's apartment, and then, coming into the drawing-

room, flung herself on the sofa and began poring over the contents of a novel, whilst I quietly moved towards the door, longing to escape to my aunt's room, a luxury that I generally managed to obtain each day Valerie suddenly said :—

“ Inez, did you find Mr. Frazer pleasant ? ”

“ No, not at all ; he was silent, and rather stupid, I thought.”

“ He is not stupid, however,” replied Valerie, “ but I fancy he was out of spirits : perhaps Agnes has been cruel ; some sentimental quarrel, no doubt, poor thing ! Captain Sanders, who sat by me, admires you so, Inez. He told me he thought you very pretty. Really, my dear, you will make quite a sensation in the garrison, but for the peace of the neighbourhood leave Mr. Frazer alone. Agnes is so jealous that, really, I am almost afraid to speak to any admirer she may have ; therefore you must never direct a glance or speak a word to Mr. Frazer. I always avoid doing so,

except when I speak of her, and even then she is suspicious of me."

"She will have no cause to suspect me, I fancy, Valerie." And for fear of getting into any further discussion I left her, and entering Mrs. Wentworth's room, found her busy writing. Yes, there she sat, her loose morning dress hanging negligently; her glossy hair parted back and shading her long white throat. So absorbed did she appear in her occupation that she scarcely seemed to notice my entrance. Her face was deeply flushed, and she seemed trembling with the earnest and agitating thoughts that she had imprinted on the paper, which appeared closely written. She looked up: her gaze was clear, expressive, full of misery; yet she sealed the letter calmly, and placing it in her desk, moved towards the window, and, to my surprise and horror, threw it open. The cold night air blew full upon her bare chest and glowing cheeks. It

seemed the act of a maniac. I sprang towards her and said—

“ Pray do not stand there ; the night air will kill you.”

I closed the window hastily. Gasping for breath, her lips growing livid, she clung to the mantelpiece, while a sudden spasm seized her. Presently a stream of blood issued from her lips, and she fell heavily to the floor. Wild with terror, I tried to raise her, and ringing violently, alarmed the household. Before they came she grasped my hand in hers, which was deathlike to the touch, tried to articulate in vain ; but with one look that I shall never forget, so full of soul and feeling was the expression, she died. Oh ! the agony of seeing a husband cling weeping to the form of one whom, two hours before, he had left in unthinking coldness. *Now* she would never look or smile on him more : she was beyond the reach of coldness or neglect ; and as we

knelt beside her couch I hoped and prayed that the remembrance of that scene might never leave us.

Valerie, faint with terror, rushed from the room, whilst I, pale as a ghost, my dress all dabbled with blood, sat near, listening in horror to my uncle's deep groans of anguish. Sounds of confusion were heard below, voices and cries of terror, while the wind went sweeping and roaring past, the cold hard rain pattering against the window, and falling in torrents from the roof. A wild night it was, seeming to mingle with our woe. She alone was calm, who, in the sleep of death, lay beside me ; she, alike insensible to the agony of him who knelt beside her there, and to the fury of the elements as they swept past. And when at length he rose from his knees and kissed me as he passed from the room, I, for the first time, shed copious tears as I bent over her and pressed her lifeless to my heart as a lover might press his bride, I loved her so.

But what was it she held so closely between her white fingers, falling on her breast as if at the last with convulsive pressure? With difficulty I disengaged it, and stooped to examine it by the firelight glimmering on me faintly. Whose hair was it in the small much-worn locket that hung by a narrow black ribbon? Looking nearer I saw the name of Edmund engraved there.

Even in death, she loved him still!

An instinctive feeling made me hide this much treasured relic in my bosom, as I hastened from the room; and to this day, I value it in secret.

Writing down all I endured during this time of mourning, my first great grief seems to bring it vividly before me. The pain of knowing *she* was lost to me for ever, whom I would have died to save, was almost insupportable. Valerie was inconsolable for some days, giving vent to her grief without, seemingly, the will or power to prevent it; while my uncle, silent and heart-stricken,

would wander up and down in a disturbed kind of wretchedness, that made my heart ache to witness. Evident preparations were now being made for our departure. My uncle sold his commission ; and was wondering whither he should take Valerie and me, for a few weeks change, when a letter summoned him to his father, who was taken dangerously ill. Mr. Wentworth, I had heard, was a very old man ; and for some time, his death had been expected. It did not come therefore, as a surprise ; nor even an affliction. Indeed, my aunt's death had thrown so deep a gloom over us all, that any new grief seemed light in comparison with what was ever present to our thoughts. The colonel was to leave for Wentworth Court immediately ; while, after a few days. Valerie and I were to stay with an aunt of her's, then living at Leamington, till arrangements should be made for our future residence. This plan accorded badly with my present frame of mind ; I wished for no

new scenes nor new acquaintances. To linger in *her* room towards dusk, collecting every little relic she had treasured, poring over the old books she had read, and recalling her lost image to my over-strained imagination, was a kind of morbid joy. Sometimes drawing aside the curtain, I would feast my eyes on the beautiful picture, till I fancied in my dreaming, that those lips moved in eloquent sweetness responding to my thoughts: and the clear hazel of her eyes grew deeper and deeper, as I gazed lovingly at their bewildering beauty. One evening, as I lingered there, my uncle entered: the sight of the picture made him turn pale as death; and after pacing hurriedly up and down the room, trembling with suppressed emotion, he said:—

“Inez, bring me her desk: I leave to-morrow, and will take it with me.” Handing him the desk and keys, I said:—

“Where is the letter she placed there? Did you take it?”

“No,” he answered, “I could not read it then; but, enclosed in it, was this.” He handed me a sealed letter, kissed me, and taking the desk, and several papers that lay on the table, he hurried from the room. Anxiously, with deep interest, I pored over the contents of that long, closely written, letter; till I seemed lost to all but her last words and thoughts. Full of remorse for the past, and entreating my forgiveness for the years of neglect, during which she had been utterly regardless of my welfare, she charged me, as I valued her love, dying as she then was, to warn Valerie against treachery and want of truth; to help her, guard her, and however I might suffer from her tyrannical temper and falsehood, not to forsake her child. I seemed as I closed that letter, to swear in my own heart as solemnly as if the words were spoken, that I would not neglect her *last* wishes;

and as darkness stole around me in that now lonely chamber of death, I shuddered at finding myself alone. I sought Valerie, who seemed to shrink from that room, and who had never entered it but once since Mrs. Wentworth's death. I found her busily packing in her room; and was pleased to find her occupied, knowing that employment of any kind was better for her, than that inactive state into which she had lately fallen. As I helped to arrange different matters with her that evening, we talked in a more friendly manner than we ever did before; than, alas! we have ever done since! I endeavoured, as best I could, to sooth her grief for that irreparable loss, which I knew she would feel more and more every year of her life: for what kindness, what sympathy or affection can equal a mother's watchful tenderness?

Yet, Valerie's grief was strange: when the violent fits of weeping were past, she would talk with cold composure of the

future ; of the gay life she would lead ; of her future brilliant prospects, and of the money she would spend, when Wentworth Court was hers. Even in our more serious talk, I felt no awakening interest in her : she could dwell for hours together on high church matters, forms of architecture, fashionable preachers, and practices ; but they seemed mere repetitions of what she had heard and read, rather than any spiritual soul breathing truth. Yet, I had no right, so to judge her ; and alas ! my own heart was evil enough. We are all hasty in our censure of others, forgetting the mercy that is afforded and dealt out to us, in unmeasured goodness, by One who is all-wise and merciful. Young, and with hasty impetuous feelings, I judged and acted too much from impulse ; and when I loved, it was with a passion and fervour that I have seldom witnessed in others ; while to those I disliked, I was cold, proud, and reserved. I had no medium *then*. In

my affections I was too susceptible, and yielding to what was perhaps wrong ; while, on the other hand, I was unbending, though not unforgiving, towards those I despised.

After my uncle's departure, Valerie and I went to Leamington, where Mrs. Harley, Colonel Wentworth's sister, met us ; and I was torn from remembrances so very dear to me ! With an aching heart, and blinded with tears, I gazed on a tomb-stone, where, written simply, was a name dearer than all on earth, " Florence Wentworth."

CHAPTER IX.

ON the day I parted from Agnes Wilton she revealed to me the sad intelligence that all engagement was at an end between her and Mr. Frazer. The continued coldness and restraint of his manner towards her had made her feel the necessity of an explanation, and then, after many hours of painful uncertainty, they had both agreed it was wisest and best to break off the engagement.

“He put it,” said Agnes, “on the plea of being in bad circumstances, with little hope for the future; but through it all I perceived that if his heart had been in it

he could not have so coldly weighed, in his own mind, an engagement which some months before he had entered into with so much zeal, imploring me not be dissuaded from it. I saw through his excuses but too clearly, and felt that he cared for Valerie; that her beauty and apparent interest in him had flattered him so far that the feelings he at first cherished for me were so much weakened that he could calmly, almost unfeelingly, give me up."

I remember the anguish that followed these words, and as I bade Agnes adieu! I begged her sometimes to think of, and write to one who would never cease to take an interest in her welfare, and who had few friends to sympathize with or love her. She *promised*, and her promises were faithfully fulfilled.

But now let me pause, and, in reviewing the past, try to bring clearly before me each hour and day of the most eventful scenes in my life—of *love*, not love in the common acceptation of the word, but strong, deep,

earnest love that is seldom felt on earth. I tremble even now to think of it ; so wholly, entirely, alas ! did I give up my soul to a passion that never could be realized. Is there no hope in earth or heaven for unrequited affection ? Yet mine *was* returned in the one and only absorbing love of him I cared for. Oh ! that fate had permitted him to break the bands that bound him, unloving, to one who gave him her heart for life ; one who might have made him happy had not another spirit more kindred to his own, loving him with a deeper, more enduring love, been ever present to mark the difference between a sympathizing mind, and one that, although bound by a closer tie, was as far apart from his as earth from heaven.

My stay at Leamington was not a pleasant time for me. Mrs. Harley, though kind, was not a person I could feel any interest in, or in whose society I could find pleasure. She was dull and full of prejudices,

as all narrow minds must be, and with an obstinacy of character that is not firmness or decision. She seemed fond of Valerie, who had now almost recovered her usual vivacity, and was looking more beautiful than I had ever seen her. Her high-church propensities were satisfied to the utmost. Daily service and the acquaintance of several young curates seemed to afford her infinite pleasure ; and by all her aunt's acquaintances she was looked upon as a serious and amiable, as well as a most beautiful young lady. I was careful never to speak of Valerie to her aunt, except in terms of admiration of her appearance, which I could do truthfully ; for although her beauty was not of the description that satisfied or pleased me, there was still something about her most striking and very handsome.

“ Take care, Valerie,” I said, one day, laughing, “ that you don't end by marrying one of the curates. Mr. Templeton is evidently in love with you.”

“ Oh ! dear no ! ” answered Valerie, “ he likes my opinions, and I must own his conversation is most interesting to me, and his sermons are perfect ; but do you think I intend to marry a curate ? You little know me if you do, and I am perfectly assured such a thought never once entered his head, Inez.”

“ Well, perhaps not,” I replied, “ but remember, people do not always know the real state of their feelings till it is too late.”

“ Ah, well ! ” answered Valerie, “ I will take care of myself ; so don’t be distressed either on Mr. Templeton’s account or mine.”

I have often thought I need not have warned her thus. In after years I discovered that her only aim was to marry richly, and, if possible, to obtain rank as well ; and most certain it was that Valerie’s determination of character was such, that if she had resolved on marrying a prince she would have effected her purpose by some means or other.

I felt now more solitary than ever. I missed my old familiar haunts, where I could wander and think of her who had died before her time, so uncared for, so unloved ! I knew that underneath that chilling reserve of manner had beat a heart full of affection, and had it but found an echo in another's breast, it would, with her strength of character and depth of feeling, have made a glorious and loving woman. Child as I was in years, she seemed to have found in *me* that which had been wanting in those nearer to her by relation and by circumstances. I could not bear to think of strangers in that old room where I had loved to dwell, gazing thoughtfully on that picture so beautiful, so calm ! old mementoes, treasured perhaps for years, lying in the old cabinets that surrounded me, half finished verses, written in the depths of despair and thrown away, perhaps forgotten and unheeded. Yes, these served to raise in me a feeling that has never passed away ; a

yearning like hers for something almost undefined, yet seemingly necessary to existence. She felt it once, and in leaving it left life. I, alas ! felt it too, but in feeling it I commenced to live.

CHAPTER X.

ONE morning, as I sat with Mrs. Harley, I said :—

“ I wonder what my other guardian, Mr. Churchill, is like, and whether he will ever take any notice of me.”

“ No doubt he will,” she replied, “ I know him slightly. He is clever, and a man of very good family.”

“ Know him, do you? Where did you meet him?”

“ Why, he is tutor to Charles Huntingdon, whose mother is one of my oldest friends. I met him at their house in Devonshire,

and thought his manner pleasant! they have been abroad some time. I fancy he has left them now, but am not certain."

I remained silent, unwilling to question her any more concerning one, who, for aught I knew, might exercise influence over me at some future time; not that I was certain of ever seeing him, but I had a girlish curiosity and interest in one who was left as a protector and guide to me, and who might sway my fate which way he pleased. I longed, though with a kind of dread, to see him. A letter, put into my hand soon after this conversation with Mrs. Harley, decided the matter, and my wish was granted. The letter, which amused me greatly, ran thus:—

"DEAR MISS WENTWORTH,—

"At the particular desire and request
"of my nephew, Mr. Churchill, I beg, in
"his name and mine, to solicit the privilege

“ and pleasure of a visit from you, as soon
“ as it may be in your power, and that you
“ may feel disposed to come to us. Your
“ valued and much respected father, Lieu-
“ tenant Wentworth, was pleased to bestow
“ on my nephew the responsible charge of
“ guardian over you, and he rightly thinks
“ that he should no longer be unacquainted
“ with one over whom he is to exercise
“ authority, and whom, for the sake of his
“ esteemed and loved friend, he takes an
“ interest in. I consider that he judges
“ wisely in this matter, and I feel that he
“ has a right to see and know that the
“ religious principles and moral precepts
“ which ought to be implanted in every
“ young woman’s heart, are brought to
“ maturity in you. Hoping, therefore, you
“ will indulge this fatherly and kind con-
“ sideration in one who wishes to act in
“ this relation towards you, we beg the
“ pleasure of a visit from you shortly, and

“ with compliments and good wishes, I sub-
“ scribe myself, my dear Miss Wentworth,

“ Yours faithfully,

“ SARAH CHURCHILL.”

I read this letter attentively, amused at the quaintness of it, and determining in my own mind, if possible, to accept this formal invitation, wondering, at the same time, whether Mr. Churchill resembled his aunt; if so, paternal or otherwise, I felt that, however my gratitude might be called forth towards him, my affection would lie dormant. Strange! to ponder thus calmly on the future, raising visions of those who are perhaps to exercise a strong and lasting influence over our destiny, and who are to appear to us in so different a light, that we smile hereafter at our vain imaginations, finding how false they were.

When I showed Valerie the letter she laughed heartily, exclaiming :—

“ And do you really intend to bury your-

self with those antiquities for the summer in a lonely seaside hamlet? for they live in the most retired part of England."

"Yes, Valerie! I think I ought to go; in truth I have some curiosity to see my other guardian. Mrs. Harley tells me he is agreeable and clever."

"Yes! that is just *like* my aunt Harley;" answered Valerie, "she makes a point of speaking highly of every middle-aged and elderly man, because her husband was nearly thirty years her senior."

"But Mr. Churchill is not old, Valerie?"

"Not old? why, he is long passed thirty, and as you are but seventeen he will try and exercise full authority over you. I have heard he is very stern, and not good-tempered. I wish you joy of your visit, my dear! Depend upon it you will be writing to Wentworth Court to beg we will receive you back. Those antediluvian people will drive you mad."

I smiled at Valerie's remarks: there

might be truth in them, but still I had a strange curiosity to see Mr. Churchill ; and the society of Mrs. Harley and Valerie neither pleased nor interested me. The one was too worldly and uninteresting to attract me ; the other too false and hard for me either to sympathize with or love, therefore, in as short a time as possible, I answered Miss Churchill's stiff document, accepting, with due gratitude and form, her invitation, and in a few days, under the care of a friend of Mrs. Harley's, who was going into that neighbourhood, I set off on a journey I had long cause to remember. I was soon to be made feel the truth of Mrs. Wentworth's words—"Life is a hard struggle from beginning to end," for I was ere long to experience the intensity of love, and the pain that so often accompanies it.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was a lovely and romantic country I was now entering upon; no railroads destroyed the beauty of the undulating ground that lay before me; no frightful edifice rose between me and the clear sky. It seemed as if my childhood had come back; a vision of something gone that had returned with a fuller beauty, for I had the power to feel it now. When, at last, through the opening of the trees, the sea, blue and tranquil, bounded the view, I felt a strange thrill of happiness, and associations crowded fast upon my heart. I was only wakened from them by my travelling companion saying:—

“ In a few minutes I must leave you, but you will only have ten miles to travel alone, perhaps we may meet before I leave the neighbourhood ;” and shaking hands with me, she departed, and I was alone. Alone, indeed ! and going to strangers whom I might not like. Yet I felt no regret at leaving Valerie : she was a continual restraint upon my words and actions ; and dull, stiff, perhaps harsh, as my new friends might prove, I should still feel lighter hearted and more free than with one, whom, though so nearly related to me, I could not love.

Steep and long as the hills seemed ; rugged as the lanes were, still I enjoyed the wild beauty that at every turn met my view. Rocks lay scattered in large masses, clothed in ivy under the hanging cliffs, while trees, in the fresh green of early summer, relieved the barrenness of the general aspect ; and the clear deep sea lying before, with the gentle sound of the waves breaking on the shore, murmured like music.

"Whose is that beautiful place?" I asked of a woman, who was now my only, companion in the coach, as we passed a stately old-fashioned mansion, whose lofty towers and extensive park had attracted my attention.

"That belongs to Sir Charles Huntingdon," she replied, "the family are not there now, but are travelling on the continent for the health of Miss Huntingdon: poor young lady! they feared she was consumptive."

"Sir Charles Huntingdon!" I said, musingly, remembering my guardian had been tutor to his son. "Then why is it," I asked, "that Mr. Churchill is not with them? I heard he was Mr. Huntingdon's tutor."

"So he is, Miss," answered the woman, "I knows nothing about it. The cook up there tells me strange stories; but then, Miss, they may not be true."

"Strange stories! of whom?" I asked.

“ Well, Miss, I don’t know that I have a right to tell ; all I knows, is, Mr. Churchill is at home, and Miss Huntingdon taken away ill to foreign lands.”

“ Don’t think I wish to learn what I have no right to enquire into,” I answered ; “ perhaps he did not suit Mr. Huntingdon.”

“ Perhaps *not*,” said the woman, as we stopped at a small village inn, where she now prepared to alight, and again I was left to my own thoughts ; till, suddenly remembering it might not be far from Linsdell, I said to the coachman :—

“ Is Mr. Churchill’s house far from here ?”

“ Not above half a mile, Miss : you go along that lane, and there is only one turning to your right.”

“ Then I will walk on,” I answered, “ and have my luggage sent after me.”

“ Why, this is where the coach usually stops, Miss,” answered the coachman ; “ but

I would, of course, have taken you on, had you wished it."

"Thank you," I replied; "but I much prefer walking;" and I slowly sauntered down the deep lane that wore the fragrance of early summer; for it was the end of May. It was the close of evening, so still and warm, that I stopped every now and then to listen to the chirp of the grasshopper, and the low warbling of birds amid the hawthorn bushes that were now tinged with the setting sun. If Mrs. Wentworth had been near me *now*, to feel the beauty of the scene, *she*, who had inspired me with a love for what was true and beautiful; who, in death, had made me think of a future existence!—but *now*, my only friend was gone, and overpowered with her remembrance, I wept. Presently a footstep approached: I started, and quickened my pace. It was only a labourer returning from work: he would, in all probability, know which was Mr. Churchill's house. I

asked him ; and he pointed to the low-thatched roof of a cottage gleaming in the light of the setting sun, amid the deep wood. Thanking him, I pursued my way down the lane, and entered a small gate opening on a gravel path, bordered with lilacs and laburnums ; and when I reached the low door of the cottage, a sea view burst upon my sight that caused me to pause for a moment, before I knocked for admittance. Humble as the abode seemed, the situation of it appeared like a sudden entrance into Paradise in that calm eventide of Summer ; and I trembled with anxiety, as I knocked gently, wondering what reception I should meet with from the inmates of this romantic dwelling. A servant girl, ill-dressed, startled-looking, and evidently very stupid, brought me to earth again ; and to my enquiry if Miss Churchill was at home, she answered :—

“ You’re the young lady that’s expected of ? then pray walk this way.” She led

me along a narrow and somewhat dark passage, and ushering me into a low, small, but pretty room, said, "Please Ma'am, here is Miss Wentworth;" then, as suddenly disappeared, and I was left *tête-à-tête* with an elderly lady, whose visage was far from prepossessing, being one that had a settled look of querulous dissatisfaction strongly delineated. After shaking hands with her, I said:—

"I walked here from the village."

"You walked *where*," said Miss Churchill, leaning down her head, as if listening attentively for my reply, and when again repeated, said:—

"From the village? and what did you do *that* for?"

"Because the evening was so exquisite, and I prefer walking," I answered, loud enough to summon any one that might have been in the house; plainly perceiving that Miss Churchill had received one of her warnings in an eminent degree.

“Is Mr. Churchill at home?” I asked, hoping at least some one would enter, and relieve me.

“Mr. Who?” asked Miss Churchill.

“Mr. Churchill!” I again screamed out.

“No, he is out; but I expect him in every instant: he will be glad to make your acquaintance; indeed we are both glad to welcome you here,” she replied stiffly. Then showing me the way to my room, she said:—

“I hope every thing will be comfortable; but Jane is such a giddy girl, and so very unmanageable, that she may not have done all I ordered.”

“Thank you,” I replied, “every thing looks very comfortable.”

“Come down as soon as you are ready,” answered Miss Churchill; “for dinner is waiting, and young people are apt to loiter.” “And no wonder,” thought I, as she left the room, “when you are awaiting them down stairs.” I almost prayed Mr. Chur-

chill might be there, when I thought of the wearying conversation I must sustain with his aunt. Lingered as long as I could, for this reason, I waited till I heard a man's step on the stairs, and then, after a few minutes, entered the drawing-room. This much dreaded guardian was standing with his back to me; and I fancied a stern face would turn towards me. His figure was tall and manly-looking, and when he did turn round to address me, he smiled. I don't know what it was, or always has been, in his smile, that so fascinated me: otherwise, his face was not regularly handsome.

"I am sorry I was not in, in time to give you your first welcome, Miss Wentworth," he said kindly; "but I am very glad to see you: your father was my best friend, and I shall ever deplore his loss." He took my hand as he said this, and looked into my face. I trembled, as I thanked him: he was neither so dread-looking, old, or stern-looking, as I had imagined he

would be ; and yet, I felt some fear of him.

“ You look afraid of me,” he continued, smiling ; “ I wonder what a young lady’s idea of a guardian is : can you define it, Miss Wentworth ? ”

“ I fancied you would have been older, and more stern.”

“ But you think me a terribly old fellow : come, confess, don’t you ? ” he asked.

“ No ; you are not very young, though : are you ? ”

“ I think I am at this moment : before I felt very antiquated, but now —— ” as he paused, I asked “ but now what ? ” He made no reply ; he seemed indeed to look stern now, and changed the conversation. I began to feel really afraid of him. I was evidently, I thought, too young for him to take the trouble of conversing with me. I had heard he was clever ; and I did not then know, how very immaterial it is to a clever man, whether a young girl is able to

converse clearly with him, if he *likes* her. Miss Churchill, now entering, looked towards her nephew, and then at me, settled her spectacles, and began knitting. Her nephew never seemed to think it necessary to address her ; but, as from time to time he questioned me of my past life, she would look up enquiringly, and say :—

“ What did you say, Edward ? ” to which he answered but once, and then said, “ I spoke of the weather. ” She appeared satisfied, and concluding with her usual expressive “ Oh ! ” enquired no further.

CHAPTER XII.

How strange to write what has caused the mystery of my life, to enter thus minutely into its details! So young, so innocent! Valerie might well have sneered at my ignorance and exceeding freshness of heart. Yet I still think of those days with rapturous feeling. Dream-land it was, surely, for earth has never been so beautiful since. *Then* the rocks were bathed in sunlight: then the waves danced in the fresh morning, and at night lay slumbering in the moonlight, which bathed in beauty the young fresh leaves of May.

It was a beautifully situated cottage, humble-looking, but so peaceful and lovely. The low windows opened on a lawn that led to the cliffs, from which there were paths steep and circuitous to the sea. The rooms were small, but cheerful ; and flowers, birds, and music all conspired to make it perfect.

Mr. Churchill remained all the morning reading and writing in his room ; so I was left with his aunt, by no means a pleasant companion. Silence was the only course to pursue ; so, for the first two mornings I remained by the window, working, answering when I was spoken to, but never venturing a spontaneous remark.

“ You are very silent for so young a child,” she said, one day, “ why is it, my dear ?”

“ I am afraid I am,” I replied.

“ Afraid of me ?” she answered, somewhat crossly, “ and for what reason, pray ?”

“ I merely said I feared I was silent,” I answered, moving close to her.

“ Oh, well, perhaps better than being too

forward at your early age. Young girls," she continued, "should not speak often, but when spoken to, and should be retiring and respectful in their manner towards their elders, especially those who are in authority over them."

I nodded my head in assent, but just then the door opened, and Mr. Churchill walked towards me, and *his* presence redeemed the tiresome hours I had spent.

"Come out into the garden with me," he said.

I hesitated, but longed to go, for Miss Churchill's little twinkling eyes were rivetted on me, and I had no power to stir.

"Why, Edward," she said, "how is it your letters are finished so soon this morning? You never come and sit with *me* till late in the afternoon. As for you, Inez, you had better stay and work; it's not fit for you to walk, and besides that, idling the day away, a practice bad for young people of your age."

He merely looked at me. I heeded her words no longer, nor could all the spirits on earth have prevailed had he bid me follow him. Calmly I put my work aside and passed the rest of the morning with him on the top of the cliffs, gazing on the sea, and listening to his talk. He first spoke to me of life and books ; he first drew forth my buried and but then half awakened feelings. Mrs. Wentworth I had loved, for she had been the first to care for me, and bid me think on life as a trial to come ; but hers was a mind worn out with a joyless and worldly life, and therefore sad as interesting ; but he to whom I now spoke freely, had yet energy and freshness of mind enough to strengthen my feelings, and enable me to look upon life with a cheerful view. He made me separate the true from the false estimate of life, on which so many who are disappointed at their first onset, fix their opinions and impressions of life. Neither love nor caresses had ever been bestowed on

me in childhood ; I therefore expected little and did not exact attention. When true feeling was offered I cherished it, and dwelt on it with thankfulness.

“ Why do you have your aunt to live with you, Mr. Churchill ?” I asked as we sat together one day, “ I don’t believe that her society gives you pleasure.”

“ No !” he replied, “ certainly not ; but she offered to come and keep house for me. I felt that by this arrangement I should afford her a comfortable home, and that in return she would relieve me from the troubles of housekeeping, for which I have *no* taste ; consequently we are helping each other, and, until you came, Inez, I rarely saw her, excepting at breakfast and dinner. Moreover, I could not well have invited you here unless my aunt had been with me ; so I hope you are not inclined to quarrel with the arrangement.”

“ Oh, no !” I answered, laughingly, “ I can endure it whilst you are with me ; but

don't go away and leave me alone with her. You have been abroad for some time with Sir Charles Huntingdon's family, have you not?"

"Yes."

Mr. Churchill rose up and walked a pace or two from me, then coming back, said:—

"Who told you anything about me, Inez?"

"Mrs. Harley," I answered.

"What did she tell you?"

I related the few words she had spoken in his praise.

"Well, I am glad she gave me a good character," he answered cheerfully; then instantly changed the conversation by asking—"Do you read much? It would be as well if you read with me sometimes of a morning. You are too young to give up study entirely."

"I should be delighted to read with you. How kind you are to think of it, you so clever, too."

"You have had but little opportunity of judging whether I am clever or not. If you like me I am content, and if *I* can serve you or help you I shall be happy, believe me."

"You are very good to me," I answered. "As to liking you, excepting my aunt, I have never liked anyone so much. Never change to me, promise me," I continued with an earnestness that seemed to move him. He turned pale as he asked—

"You wish me to be as a father to you, do you not?"

"Yes!" I replied, "I only trust I may be obedient to your every wish. I will strive to be all you can desire; from my heart I say this. An orphan and unloved, I should indeed be ungrateful if I did not try to merit your esteem."

"And you will be obedient, Inez; remember, give me your hand upon it. What a tiny childish hand you have," he said, as I gave it to him.

After awhile we once more entered the

sitting-room where Miss Churchill sat ; and she cast on us a glance I should not like often to encounter.

“ I wonder,” she said, “ my nephew encourages such idleness, a whole morning spent on the cliffs doing nothing ; if it had been with a young man I should have deemed it most improper, not that I mean to say Edward is old ; he is indeed quite in the prime of life ; but then he acts as guardian to you, and entertains a fatherly feeling towards you. If this were not the case I should be much annoyed at your conduct. Young ladies cannot be too particular ; the stricter they are kept, the better ; and as for doing what you have done this morning, *I* was never guilty of such an imprudence in my life.”

I made no reply, and Miss Churchill no doubt was pleased at my appearing thus quietly to take her advice. I could fancy her whole life had been spent in lecturing and advising.

Oh ! those early summer mornings ! the hanging branches of the ash and flower-laden acacia waved in the fresh breeze, and the rich-coloured damask roses scented the sweet air. Picture me sitting at the open window of that small dining-room with Edward Churchill, sometimes reading to me, whilst at others he would say—"Read to me, Inez ; I like to hear you read." And so the mornings passed, Miss Churchill quite satisfied, because he was instructing me ; and I fully satisfied, for I was happy, and told Mr. Churchill so, Then he would fix such an anxious look upon my face, and turn to his writing again, with a sigh that used to rend my very heart. He was so strange, too, but that made me like him more. Sometimes he was almost harsh ; then, though I liked, I dreaded him ; and, when alone, would mourn that I was not clever, so that he might care to talk to me. He would speak of books, and his impression of them, with so much earnestness and

discrimination that I fancied I must have read them also, and thought the same of them. Ah! I little knew, then, what it was threw such a halo over everything he said and did; and well for me.

One morning, as I sat reading to him, Miss Churchill entered the room, saying—

“Edward, here are foreign letters.”

He rose; he turned paler than I had ever seen him; he moved towards her without speaking: how his lips trembled as he hastily seized them from her and crushed them into his pocket.

“What makes you so pale?” she asked, “but it’s over anxiety, no doubt, and quite right.”

“Hush!” he said, in a voice of thunder, and frowned terribly, while Miss Churchill, looking rather alarmed and more stupid than usual, went away. I also moved towards the door, thinking he might like to read his letters in solitude, when he stretched

out his hand, and taking my arm, drew me near him.

“ Inez, why do you go ? ”

“ I thought you wished to read your letters.”

“ And does your remaining here prevent my doing so ? Sit down ; you need not go.”

“ I feared you had unpleasant news, you turned so very pale.”

“ Unpleasant news before I had opened my letters ! a wise remark of yours, Inez ! ”

He then broke the seals ; walked to the open window ; read them with such an expression of face that I was almost frightened, and then tore them to pieces, and scattered them to the winds. All that day he was gloomy, and looked ill, scarcely speaking. I was, therefore, left to the tender mercy of Miss Churchill, whose incessant “ What did you say ? ” at every endeavour of mine to converse with her, sent me almost distracted, and with a dreadful nervous headache, to my room. Though the sun shone as brightly,

and the flowers looked gay as they had looked for many days, something seemed wanting. I almost wished that nature had grown dark and sorrowed with me. It was not till late in the evening that the sound of a deep melodious voice singing, as he alone could sing, made me descend quickly to the drawing-room, where he was sitting at the piano alone. He did not stop or turn to speak to me: he went on singing, as though his very soul was poured forth in song; and I listened and wept silently; wept because he seemed, even for a few hours, estranged from me. Foolish girl that I was, thus to give vent to my feelings; but at sixteen who is wise?

I was not long in coming to the conclusion that there was something weighing on Mr. Churchill's mind. Ever since the morning he had received those letters from the continent his manner had completely changed, becoming moody, and even, at times, irritable; whilst he would sometimes absent

himself from our society for hours together, and when we met at dinner he would sit in total silence, and scarcely take any nourishment. His sunken eye and pale worn face made me feel certain that he was either very ill, or that some calamity had befallen him, which he was silently wrestling with. To Miss Churchill's remarks he scarcely deigned a reply, and when I spoke, which was now but seldom, he would answer, but, at the same time, look so wretched, that a profound silence was even preferable. All that had made my life so happy in that peaceful and beautiful spot, seemed gone, left as I was for hours together with a tiresome old woman, whose only talk was asking questions about nothing, or giving me what she deemed good advice. Advice from those you love is seldom pleasant, but when coming from those whom you neither love nor esteem, becomes intolerable. Wondering whether she noticed her nephew's altered manner, I ventured to say, one day—

“Don’t you think Mr. Churchill looks ill and out of spirits?”

“Perhaps so,” she answered, “he often is.”

“Do you think,” I rejoined more boldly, “that he is attached to any one, or has been disappointed?”

Miss Churchill was very long before she clearly understood my words; but when she *did*, a look of horror and affected prudery was cast on me, as she answered—

“I think, Miss Inez, your question is impertinent as unmaidenly. At your age such ideas should never enter your head. I am quite *shocked* to think how full your head is of school-girl folly and sentiment. I am ashamed of you, Miss;” and rising slowly from her seat she left the room, casting on me what she doubtless considered one of her severest glances, but which had only the effect of causing me to smile at her ridiculous old maidish notions, and sincerely to hope that if I was destined to remain Miss Wentworth, I might be moulded differently.

Being alone in the evening I began looking over Mr. Churchill's music, and ended in singing some of his favourite songs. When I turned round he was leaning against the verandah, and said—

“ You have a sweet voice : go on singing.”

He drew a chair near the piano, and as I concluded I heard him say—“ I can bear this no longer.”

He was looking straight at me, and so earnestly that I blushed violently.

“ Something is distressing you, Mr. Churchill, I am sure. Why will you not let me help you, or if you are suffering let me share it with you.”

“ Inez, why do you care what I am feeling ? I should have thought I was neither young enough nor handsome enough to obtain your interest ; besides, I am your guardian, a *frightful* word.”

“ If you don't believe me I have little left to say,” I replied, moving towards the window.

“ Inez, would you like to return to your uncle ? I fear it is dull for you here with no companion, and *there* you would have Miss Wentworth. I feel it is selfish, wishing you to remain with such as we are.”

I did not answer : I walked hastily from the room on to the lawn, till I reached an arbour, where, when I first came, we had sat together, reading, of an evening. I remained in silent lonely suffering. I had no friends then ! no one even liked me ! I had better have died with my parents. So I thought in the first bitterness of that moment, and Mr. Churchill did not follow me or say a kind word. It was very late when I joined him again. He was still alone, not reading, but with his face bent down, buried in his hands.

“ Inez,” he said, “ I have offended you ; forgive me. I appear inhospitable and heartless, do I not ?”

“ Oh, no !” I replied, coldly, “ your advice is good, no doubt. I will write to

Valerie to-morrow, to know if they can receive me at Wentworth Court."

"You think," he continued, as if not heeding my remark, "that I wish to get rid of you; that you are a burden to me, and that you have not found a friend: that is what you have been thinking since you left the room."

"There seems truth in it, if I have," I answered.

Mr. Churchill rose, his tall fine figure seeming to grow more majestic as he approached, and his eyes full of tears, he came near me.

"You think all this, do you not, Inez?"

"Yes!" I murmured, tremblingly, while my heart beat loud and fast, and my words seemed to choke me as I answered: "I know I have nothing in me to make you care for me: I am an orphan, poor, desolate, dependent. No one cares for me."

There seemed, as I spoke, a violent

struggle for mastery over himself, and he exclaimed :—

“ What shall I say? God help me! Inez, you see before you at this moment the most miserable of men.”

“ I have long noticed your depression, Mr. Churchill; why will you, then, so determinedly keep it close in your own heart, letting no one share it? I would help you if I could.”

“ Would you?” he exclaimed, clasping my hands in his, “ do you, then, care for me and feel for me?”

“ I would do anything to serve you, cost me what it might,” I answered through my tears.

“ Inez, come and read with me to-morrow morning as you used to do; let us be happy once more, and drown care in forgetfulness.”

I needed no pressing. Once again came happiness; once more did I experience what all must prize, that sympathy of taste and feeling, which is so necessary, I think,

to happiness, yet so seldom granted us ; never, perhaps, in its fullest sense : in youth we taste of its delights for a moment sufficiently to make us mourn for it, when like a shadow it has passed away. It is not always love that first gilds our early life ; not love, in the common acceptation of the word, but the first deep feeling, let it come in what shape it may.

My early and enthusiastic feeling for Mr. Churchill seems a thing separate and distinct from any I have since experienced ; deeper, perhaps, because more earnest ; purer, from being more devoid of self. Too happy in his friendship, I let no thought of the future come between me and happiness. I was full of joy and life : the days only seemed too short, the hours to glide too quickly. Another fortnight passed in the same peace I had first enjoyed on coming there ; and yet all care had not left his brow. No ! often he would look as if reminded of some grief that tortured him,

and he scarce seemed to heed what passed around him. One day I said, jokingly—

“ You are so absent ; there must be some cause for it ;” and I then repeated my conversation with Miss Churchill, and her severe reprimand on my curiosity, and questions regarding him.

“ Why did you not ask me,” he said, “ if you wished to know, you silly little Inez ? but now let me tell you, I have not been in love with any one nor disappointed. Will that content and satisfy you ?”

“ I don’t much care whether you have or not, but I don’t quite credit that ; but I daresay it is long since forgotten.”

“ I cannot forget what never existed,” he replied, “ but I agree with Aunt Sarah ; you had better read the History of England than the history of the heart, at sixteen.”

“ I am very nearly seventeen,” I answered.

“ Dear me ! are you really ? I must begin to treat you with more deference.”

“ You have not hitherto talked to me as if you thought me so very young, Mr. Churchill, so I see no reason why you should begin now. I like to be treated as your companion and friend.”

“ And are you not ?” he asked.

“ Yes, sometimes ; but I do not like to be despised.”

“ Despised ! who said you were ? I certainly do not despise you : I wish to improve and cultivate your mind, and now you look angry, as if I had injured you.”

“ Pray forgive me, Mr. Churchill ; I am very foolish. Shake hands with me before I leave you, or I shall think you are annoyed with me.”

He kissed my hand, and I repaired to the drawing-room, where Miss Churchill sat in solitary grandeur.

“ I hope,” she began, “ my nephew keeps you strict at your reading, and does not allow talking : it is the worst thing possible for children.”

"But I am no longer a child," I answered.

"No longer *what*, a child did you say?"

"Yes, I am nearly seventeen, and only read for my amusement. Mr. Churchill does not oblige me to do so."

"Remember, Miss Inez," she replied, "that you are now under our charge, and we both look for *that* respect and deference which youth should pay to age. The way you answer is very pert and forward, and I must warn my nephew to exercise, henceforward, a stricter discipline over you."

As I passed the dining-room door shortly after this conversation, I heard Miss Sarah's voice in full eloquence, and his voice every now and then chiming in, while the words "Never fear; *I* will keep her in order, Aunt Sarah. She will learn to be obedient to me, I hope;" and when I saw Miss Churchill again, her face wore a satisfied expression.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ I do not see, Inez, why our walks should be confined to the cliffs and beach. Would you not like to take some rambles in the neighbourhood ?” asked Mr. Churchill, as we one evening returned from our usual walk on the cliffs.

“ Yes, very much !” I answered, “ and there is one very lovely place I long to see ; Sir Charles Huntingdon’s. I passed it as I came here. Could I walk there, do you think ?”

“ Certainly not,” he replied, “ it is very nearly five miles from here.”

“ I am so disappointed,” I said, and I suppose I must have looked so, for he observed—

“ Do you, then, so much wish to go ?”

“ I do, certainly, but never mind. What other pretty spots are there near ?”

“ No !” he answered, “ since you so desire it you shall go. I will hire a pony-carriage, and Aunt Sarah can accompany you to-morrow.”

“ And you not go ?”

“ I cannot go,” he said, with a degree of bitterness in the tone, while he rose abruptly to quit the room.

“ Mr. Churchill, come back,” I said “ you are annoyed, but why I cannot imagine.”

“ How exceedingly silly you are, Inez, to think for a moment I could be annoyed at your wishing to see beautiful grounds. I have told you you can go ; does not that suffice ?”

“ Not while you remain at home,” and I was going to add, “ look so displeased,” but I checked the words.

“ Since you wish it, I will go,” he answered. “ I have often been over the grounds, but they are so beautiful, I don’t object to seeing them again.”

“ Then you will drive me thither,” I said, joyously.

“ Anything you like,” he said, smilingly, and left me.

A feeling of disquiet stole over me as I pondered on Mr. Churchill’s words. They had been few, certainly, but I could not divest myself of the idea that there was more meaning in his dislike to accompanying me to Sir Charles Huntingdon’s grounds, than he chose to say ; and then, as in all cases where thought begins to work, a thousand reasons convinced me. Why did he never mention the Huntingdons, people he had lived with so long, and from whom, I had heard, he had received kindness : why, when foreign letters had come, did his manner change so towards me, looking ill at ease, too, and unhappy, and only when the

intelligence they conveyed appeared forgotten did he return with pleasure to his pursuits, and lose his reserve. There was some mystery in all this, yet it did not promise me any pleasure, the thought of fathoming it, which a mystery generally affords to young people, particularly young ladies. No, it seemed to bring a change of feeling I could not account for, a presentiment of evil that left me dissatisfied with all around me, and weighed upon my spirits. The books that generally pleased me lost their charm that day. Even when Mr. Churchill sang my favourite songs, listless and spiritless I did not listen to them ; and though the evening was warm and lovely, I did not, as was my usual custom, walk either on the shore, or wander in the lanes near the cottage, till the moon shone clear. I sat, book in hand, by the open window, refusing to walk, while he, with a look of surprise and slight annoyance, went for a walk with his aunt.

From that next afternoon I date the com-

mencement of what so long hung like a thick cloud over my young days ; and yet I awoke that morning with a light heart, thinking of the delight of seeing those grounds clothed in all the beauty of a glorious June.

After driving through the many winding lanes that led from the cottage, we entered the broad highway, and soon burst upon my sight, in the full rich sunlight, the Huntingdons' home. The park gates opened at Mr. Churchill's bidding, as if by magic, and we drove up the long avenue, I exclaiming at the fineness of the trees and the extensive view that met our gaze. Yet my companion seemed absent and silent, and the gloom increased as we approached the house.

The servant having taken the pony-carriage, Mr. Churchill turned to me and asked if I had any curiosity to see the house.

“ If we have time after seeing the grounds,” I answered, “ but oh ! do be quick, I long to explore every nook and corner of this enchanting fairy-land. If I were in your

place, and had leave to go over them when I chose, I should spend half my life here."

He murmured something, but so unintelligibly that in vain I strove to catch the meaning, but it seemed as though he muttered curses, so black did his countenance become, while the air, the sun, the flowers, seemed in their light beauty to act as a strange and glaring contrast to his pain-stricken face, and he moved by my side like one in a troubled dream; whilst I, half frightened, ran from him hastily down a sort of glen in the park, where deer were feeding, and the shadows of the fine old trees streamed on the grass, and the sunshine trembled through the large dark leaves. I watched Mr. Churchill's figure as he moved towards me, with a deepening interest. It seemed always, when he was near me, that existence had a charm; whilst, if he were absent, though it brought no actual grief, there was a void nothing else would satisfy. If he spoke I hung upon each word he uttered till

I believed it was my own thought. When he was silent I would endeavour by playfulness to dispel it, but oftener would so sympathize with his spirit that I could not speak when he was sad.

“What is the matter,” I cried, as he drew nearer, “that you look thus? Take me to those flower-gardens, and on to that deep wood : its shade looks inviting.”

“Well, come ! I am not preventing you,” he said, drawing my arm within his own kindly ; “but as for the wood, it’s always damp, and you have thin shoes on ; you cannot go.”

“*Damp !*” I replied, “why there has not been a drop of rain for more than a fortnight. I must really go.”

“Then you shall go alone. I remain in the flower-garden,” he said, decidedly.

I left him in the garden, surrounded by roses of all hue, where he sat musingly, whilst I ran on quickly through the deep tangled wood, till I reached a pool of deep

dark water. Under the trees that shaded it there was a rude wooden bench, on which, on closer inspection, some names were carved. I stooped to examine them. Several I had never heard of, but, close together, were two names that seemed to me to claim attention, so clearly were they hewn; and in rivetted attention and breathless anxiety I read the names of Edward Churchill and Ellen Huntingdon. I must have lingered, for his voice called my name loudly, and I ran to the entrance of the wood, where he stood awaiting me.

“Pray come with me to the end of the wood, Mr. Churchill.”

I looked imploringly, and he followed in silence, till we reached the bench, when I said :—

“Look at your name and Miss Huntingdon’s: did you carve them? tell me about her—did you like her?”

“You ask so many questions at once,” he answered, smiling; “I find it difficult to

answer you. I did carve them, however : will that satisfy you ?”

“ No,” I answered hastily, “ it will not.”

“ I advised you not to come to this abhorred spot,” he said.

“ It is a beautiful spot, Mr. Churchill : and if you think seeing your name carved on a bench, and Miss Huntingdon’s annoys me, you are, for once, quite mistaken : I merely asked about her from curiosity ; and I think, had I as kind friends as you have had in the Huntingdons, I should sometimes mention their names.”

“ Come and sit beside me on the bench, Inez.”

I neither spoke nor moved. He sat for some time looking cross and frowning. I pretended not to notice it ; but all the time I was pondering on his strange moods. Presently something glittered past me like a shot, and sank into the dark closing waters, whilst I heard him mutter ; and as I turned

towards him, I asked what it was he threw away.

“What most people like to possess,” he said, “a ring.”

“Why, you have not thrown away that beautiful blue ring I have so often admired, have you?”

“The fish may be attracted towards it,” he replied, “more than I ever was.”

“For shame, Mr. Churchill!” I answered, “I shall take very good care never to bestow anything upon you.”

“Yes,” he answered, “you shall bestow on me one gift: and it shall not be cast away: more valuable than gold or diamonds, more beautiful too, I think.”

“I have neither gold nor diamonds,” I answered, smiling; “and whatever I have, I will not lightly give away.”

“I shall not demand it yet,” he said: “I shall like to see it each day grow more beautiful, till at last I shall feel proud of calling it my own.”

“ But I have nothing to give, and what have I that each day grows more beautiful? I fear you have lost your senses, this afternoon : what are you talking about ?”

“ Never mind : only when I demand it, promise it to me, whatever it may be.”

“ I only promise what I hope to fulfil : any thing I have I would give to you, except two lockets—one with my mother’s hair, and another which I found round my aunt’s neck when she died.”

“ I shall not exact either. Come, let us walk : lean on my arm, Inez : you look tired and pale.”

For another hour we roamed through lawn and shrubbery, wood and dell ; till, weary with walking, I entreated to rest, and looked towards the house.

“ You do not care to see the house,” he said ; “ do you ? you can rest on this garden seat with me : the house is only like other grand houses.” I saw he did not wish me to go in, and I rested, gazing on its lofty

turrets till the sun sank behind them, and evening closed.

It was very late when we returned ; and Miss Churchill looked black as night, saying she liked punctuality, and wondered her nephew thus encouraged and indulged a mere child in every whim ; but I looked into his eyes, and saw that he was happy. But why did mine respond to his every look and a trembling thrilling joy course through my veins, if he but spoke.

CHAPTER XIV

A FEW days of rain and cloud followed the delightful brightness, and July came in with west breezes and driving mists. The ground that had been parched and white with the scorching sun of midsummer, grew moist; and a fuller green was visible in the deep leaves of summer.

I could scarcely believe that nearly six weeks had passed since I first entered that, now to *me*, enchanting home, seeming, indeed, the realization of all I had dreamed of in my childhood. But was it alone the romantic scenery, swelling ocean, and up-

land glade, that brought such rich fancies to fuller perfection, or the absence of those who had caused my grief? Was it not, rather, that all my feelings in the first fervour of youth, ere I knew the power of bringing them under subjection, were given *then*, wholly and purely to Edward Churchill?

Yet, surely, in each life there may be two separate existences: one, in which we scarcely seem to rest on earth, so visionary, so transient is our excess of joy: then comes a living death, a sudden cessation of our life of dreams; and we wake to a better stronger life; and love, that we might have deemed cold, is all we need to make our life pass in peaceful happiness. Yet, would I write what I once felt, with the simple truth in which it was given.

The rain and mists that darkened the heavens, seemed to fall in gloom and sadness on the spirit of one, whom I now watched with a deeper anxiety; for again the chilling reserve was visible, and the heart-rending

expression told of unquiet thoughts lingering unseen by human eyes, and wasting the life within.

For once a strong resolve was made : I would know it ; if pain, love, or despair, ah ! even crime, lingered there, to me it should be laid bare ; but how and where ?

This thought rose and rose within me, and was again quelled and silenced : every moment I breathed, the air seemed suffocating. I rose in the dead of night to ponder on it : as one who meditates some fearful crime, is haunted with the thought till maddened he commits it. So did my overstrained diseased fancy determine, that ere another dawn, I would know all. Yet, another and another found me wavering and weak. I had no power to ask him anything, and I grew ill with anxiety and lost spirits. I would sit working with Miss Churchill in silence most of the day, and in these silent moods would ponder how I could best put into execution what I so earnestly

desired. How well I remember the evening I gained my object! Still and calm it was, after the wind and rain; and all that afternoon, the sun had streamed over the wet grass and shining leaves with a mellow light; and the broad sea lay so white and calm, that the sails of the numerous ships that covered it, were reflected as in a mirror. It was oppressively hot, too. Tea being over, I saw Mr. Churchill take a book, and saunter down the hill: I knew he was going to sit either on the cliffs or shore: I would follow him, but not yet, for Miss Churchill was on the lawn. In about an hour's time she entered, and, fortunately for me, had a bad headache, and went to bed. Never was opportunity more perfect, and never before had I rejoiced in the ailment of any human being; but now, to be alone and wander where I liked, unheeded, was delightful.

I had laid my heavy mourning dress aside, and put on a white dress that evening.

It looked so cool and becoming, that as I passed from the room, I turned to look at myself, ere I departed, with a half childish pleasure and vanity ; then left the house, and ran quickly to the shore. Mr. Churchill did not seem to notice my approach : he was, no doubt, absorbed in reading ; nor did he look up for some moments, seeming as if he wished I had not come ; but I was, for once, resolved. I told him I had come purposely to talk ; such continued silence was not pleasant to me ; that he must put his book aside when I told him. I said it, smiling, half in jest he might have thought it ; but, as if my word was one of command he laid his book down, and said :—

“ I knew that you would come to-night.”

“ Knew that I should come,” I said,
“ how can that be ?”

“ Because I felt it, Inez,” he said.

“ Where did you feel it, Mr. Churchill ?”

“ Where all things are felt, Inez ; but why do you stand there in your shadowy

attire, leading me on like some water nymph, in your cool white dress? how sweet you look in it! sit down."

It was a low ledge of rock close to where the waves broke, or rather rippled over the smooth shingle. And now the moon was up, flooding it with silver stars; and I was near him looking at this sea of glory: happiness enough, surely; yet I had work to do: it must be done.

"You knew that I should come," I began, "did you think I had anything to ask you, that I have come here to seek you?"

"You have wished it for long," he answered, "and must wish it longer still."

"That I will not, Mr. Churchill, you will deprive me of my senses soon: why do you shun me? why are you dull, sad, and careworn? *why?*—if the sea come round me, which it soon will, for the tide is coming in fast; if the waters close upon me, I will not leave till here, face to face, you tell me *all*."

"Girl! you torture me beyond power of

endurance! Woman! Spirit! whatever you are, you are ever present, yes, were I severed from you a thousand miles; were oceans betwixt us, here would you be in my heart and soul." He flung me from him: he wept passionately, and the sea did come in, and now almost surrounded us, skirting the dark cliffs. He talked wildly: I scarcely understood his words, he spoke despairingly of himself, yet told me nothing that I cared to hear; only of his faults which I had never seen; of his grief, yet not the cause.

"It matters not," I said, "you must tell me your secret: yes, girl, child, as you call me, I will hear it."

"It is," he answered, "that I love you beyond all else, beyond heaven or earth. Each would be void if you were absent from me—and yet, and yet—" he paused, growing deadly pale, and his hands trembled, whilst he exclaimed:—

"We are nearly surrounded by water!" Snatching me in his arms, he strained me

to his heart: through the water he bore me like a child, uttering words that vibrated through me.

“ Say you could love me, Inez ! say it again and again : I shall live then.”

“ Love you ! did you doubt it ?—I shall love you for ever.”

“ Then I swear,” he cried “ that no tie shall sever us : I *will* be free. You are mine : yes, let my name be classed among the dishonoured ; let contempt rest on me ! all I will bear for you.”

It seemed a dream, is still a dream, that love, that shore, those rocks bathed in moonlight, I, in his arms, pressed to his heart, he loving me !

“ Oh ! what a foretaste of heaven,” I then thought.

Unheeding my white dress clinging damp round me, my hair falling wet and dank with his tears, he bore me on till we reached the cottage, where all was still ; and placed

me by the kitchen fire, rubbing my hands, till I said :—

“ It is getting very late ; I must leave you ; what will Miss Churchill say ? ”

“ You go then before you know the secret. Promise, Inez,” he said, “ that it will not influence you to love me less.”

“ Nothing would do that,” I said smiling.

“ Promise, whatever happens, whatever you may hear, that you will be my wife.”

“ It will be before you have asked me,” I said.

“ Folly ! ask you ? then Inez, will you be my wife ? swear that you will.”

“ Have I not said I love you ? does not that suffice ? ” I answered ; “ but stop ; what should prevent it ? what is your secret ? ”

“ One word will sum up my present and past misfortune,” he said ; “ I am engaged ! ”

I did not cry or faint : I looked steadily at the fire ; but my life was going fast, and

the world grew dark. I could not speak ; I gasped for breath. I tried to rise, but my strength forsook me. He knelt beside me burying his face down.

“ To Ellen Huntingdon ? ” I asked, when I could speak.

“ Do not speak of her. I *never* loved her ; and now she has brought such misery on me I hate her for it.”

“ Do not breathe such cruel words,” I said ; “ perhaps you once told *her* you loved her ; perhaps, like me, she has been pressed to your heart as I have been this night, and like her, I may have to hear that you hate me.”

I sobbed despairingly.

“ Never ! never ! Inez,” he said, “ while life is left I will not desert you ; never leave you. Surely such love as I bear you must meet with sympathy and gratitude.”

So he spoke for long, pouring his words so fast on me that I at length said—

“ I cannot hear any more ; my very senses

seem leaving me ; tell me all to-morrow, and *then*——” The word died on my lips, I could not say “ then I will decide.”

Presently the door opened, and Miss Churchill, robed in a red dressing-gown, and with a nightcap like a pyramid, entered, and stood looking at us both.

“ What is this ? ” she said, “ are people to be frightened out of their sleep at this hour ? Why, Edward, what has happened ? I think I am dreaming. And *you*,” she said, looking at me, “ I beg, Miss Inez Wentworth, that you will retire to your room ; your behaviour is unpardonable.”

She waved her hand, and the nightcap shook from the effects of her rage. I left the room, and Mr. Churchill then explained to his aunt that I was not so much to blame as she imagined ; that I had been foolish in venturing out so far on the rocks alone that the water had surrounded me, and that he had found me terrified and wet, and had carried me through the water and brought

me home in his arms almost fainting with alarm, and had taken me to the kitchen, where there was a fire.

“ You must forgive her this once, aunt,” he said, “ and we must be stricter for the future with her. Remember, she is a mere child. I shall not allow her to go out again unless I can accompany her.”

Miss Churchill seemed pacified, for when I saw her next morning she told me that she would forgive me *this* time, but for the future they must be more strict with me.

A long sleepless night was passed in conflicting feelings: the path of *duty* was plainly marked, but happiness, I feared, was gaining ground, and in the ascendancy.

The next morning we sat together in a deep wood, and the following tale was told. I can hear each word distinctly in the wind as it now passes me; I can hear Mr. Churchill say — “ Inez, listen to me patiently, and do not scorn me for it all;” and how I did listen to the end.

“ I need not tell you,” he said, “ how my earliest days passed ; how I mourned my mother’s death, and was left with a father whose only object seemed to have me highly educated, so that I might make an independence for myself. I need not speak of his love for his eldest born, who was to be the head of the family, while I, the younger, was to toil and grieve. I will not enter into painful particulars of my early youth ; I do not wish it. I loved my father, with all his pride : I still love my brother, though he has well nigh ruined me. At my father’s death the estate came to Eldred, an estate so encumbered that after a vain and hard struggle to keep it up, my brother, whose wild and dissipated pursuits suited not a country life and small means, sold it, and repaired to London ; there he entered upon a life I would gladly veil over, nor dwell upon *non*. I went to the bar, and might, had I been born with steady pur-

pose and firmer principles, have not only gained distinction in my profession, but have made, what was then so necessary, money. I had talents, yet I did not use them; feeling, but I let it take a wrong course. Not only my own debts, for the expenses I often incurred, were demanding payment, but my brother was a claim upon me. He often entreated for sums of money, and they were given; and this went on for some years. I remember his knocking at my chambers one morning, coming in hurriedly and saying—‘Edward, if you do not help me I am a ruined man: I know not where to turn.’ He looked at me supplicatingly. ‘What is the sum?’ I asked, tremblingly. ‘Three thousand pounds,’ he said, with a fixed look of despair, ‘a gambling debt, or I would not have come to you again. My life must answer if it is not paid.’ He laid down his head and groaned. ‘It is almost all I have left on earth, God

knows, Eldred,' I exclaimed; 'but I will give it you.' 'It shall be on good security it is lent,' exclaimed my unfortunate brother, 'and I promise that from this day I will give up what has brought me to beggary.' How vain his promises were I need not tell, nor how weak his nature was, struggling with his warm heart; but with tears he blessed me for saving him, whilst I pondered what I should do. My profession grew irksome to me; hard work caused my health to fail me; I pined for country air, country pursuits, and kindred hearts. A mere chance caused me to leave London; it was this. I was one day calling on a friend and complaining to him of my present mode of life; how unsuited it was to me; how much I should prefer to work in the country, if work I must. 'Strange!' he said, 'for I have this very morning been asked to recommend a tutor to Sir Charles Huntingdon's son; he was to be clever, of course, and a gentleman; you

are both, and if the sum offered, £300 a year, would suffice, why not take it?' On the impulse of the moment I accepted it, and bade my friend write, and a month afterwards I found myself in the very same coach you travelled in, and stopping at those very gates you so much wished to enter. Oh! that *I* had never entered them!"

Mr. Churchill paused a moment, and then continued his narrative, though his face grew dark and troubled as he said—

"Well, on the steps of his own house I first saw Charles Huntingdon, a fine-looking youth of eighteen, with a joyous warm manner; and I think, like you, Inez, he was glad to find I was neither old nor cross-looking. We were soon good friends. 'We dine at seven o'clock,' he said, 'I must then introduce you to my father;' and showing me to my room, he left me. I looked out upon those beautiful flower-gardens and park, then gilded with

the sun of a summer evening, with rapturous admiration, for my long stay in London made everything look fresher and more beautiful than before, and nature seemed rejoicing with me. I lingered there till the deep-sounding bell summoned me, and I entered the drawing-room. I can see them all now in that long, handsome, but cold-looking room; for there was a decided absence of comfort about it, notwithstanding the costly silk hangings, large mirrors, and painted walls; and it seemed to say, 'You must likewise be stiff, cold, and yet polished, or you will not suit its inmates.' Pride was written upon every feature of the old baronet, as he advanced to shake hands with me; pride in the bow of his wife, whose importance she wished me to feel in each word she uttered, though it was kindly said. I was a Churchill; as noble blood flowed through my veins, yet, as the tutor of their son I was looked down

upon, and my pride, though of a different sort, rose at the bare idea, and I wondered why I had chosen, of my own free will, so disagreeable an office. But another form was visible, sitting in a deep recess of one of the large windows, a slight form, clad in pure white. I turned to look; she seemed not to be noticed by them, or if she was, they had thought no introduction necessary; but I looked again, and a gentle pair of blue eyes glanced towards me. Her hair was of a shadowy very light brown, hanging long, and slightly dishevelled, and I remember thinking her dress, hair, and eyes so colourless, and yet she was pretty, and her figure slight and somewhat bending. When, at last, her father perceived her, and said, 'Ellen, let me introduce Mr. Churchill to you,' she looked up, bowed, and smiled; but it was such a *weak* smile, such a vacant expression round the mouth. 'She is not

one of my beauties,' I thought, 'and quite as well, for I should not fall in love with her,' and I never did."

Interrupting Mr. Churchill, I asked how he gained the responsible charge of being my guardian, and what was the origin of his friendship for my father.

"I was at school with him," was Mr. Churchill's reply; "we were very great friends, and when he married and left for India we kept up a constant correspondence. When I first began life in London he wrote to me before going into action, to know if I, who entertained so deep a friendship for him, would, if anything happened to him, act as one of the guardians to his only child. Such a request, and at such a time, I was not likely to refuse, particularly from my oldest and best friend; therefore, Inez, you were left under my guidance."

"And must I submit to you?" I asked.

"No, you shall govern me," he answered, smiling.

I wondered what spirit on earth could govern his; but I merely bade him proceed with his story, and made no comment, except to say—

“Let me tell the story. Notwithstanding the colourless hair and weak smile of the pretty Ellen, you fell in love with her, bound yourself secretly to her, without the knowledge of her proud father and worldly mother, and now, like the rest of mankind, you have grown weary of her, and are fickle as air.”

“Let me tell my own tale,” he replied, “before you so hastily conclude. I have no incident to relate worth recording of the first week or so I passed at H——— Park. As for the fair Ellen, she seldom appeared but at luncheon or dinner, and spoke so little, when she did, that she might have seemed as a mere piece of pretty furniture that I saw daily. Her mother looked at *her*, then at me, sometimes, with a look which said, ‘remember the immeasurable

gulfs that roll between you;' and I, in consequence, did not tender those little attentions that most men offer to a young and pretty woman; on the contrary, I seldom spoke to her, and Lady Huntingdon evidently thought she had nothing to fear, and was most civil and kind in her manner towards me. 'Charles was so improved,' she would say, 'even in this short time; and I trust, Mr. Churchill, you will impress upon his mind how necessary it is for him to become steadier and to study hard.' I was then to become counsellor as well as teacher. She little knew how unfit I was for such an office; yet, perhaps, having thus to guide another made me feel how essential it now was to keep strict watch over myself; how I should strive to make amends for the long time I had allowed what might have turned to good account to run to waste.

"In the autumn of that year Charles Huntingdon and I left H——— Park for a small estate in Scotland, belonging to

the family, where we remained all the winter and spring, and during that time I saw visible improvement in my pupil. He grew to like me, too, with a really strong affection, and the long wintry months passed quickly and happily.

CHAPTER XV.

“IT was June when we once more entered Charles Huntingdon’s home, and all the family were in London for the season: we therefore had the house to ourselves. I wondered he did not wish to join them there; but at that time, never having tasted the pleasures of a London life, he seemed to prefer remaining in the country, where, with his horses, dogs, and good fishing, he appeared quite in his element.

I should also have been very happy during this time, if unpleasant news had not reached me of Eldred, who having gone on from

bad to worse, was now quite ruined, and moreover, to add to his folly, had taken unto himself a wife. Penitent letters, but still imploring assistance, reached me : could I let them pass unnoticed ? at first, I determined on doing so, knowing full well that would not be the last time a claim would be made on my generosity ; but, at last, I wrote a cheque for the sum desired, telling them both very *decidedly*, in my letter, that must *indeed* be the last time I could give them anything, as I had barely sufficient left to defray the expenses I then incurred. A letter, overflowing with gratitude, from his young and lovely bride, seemed to repay me for what I had done ; and promises from my brother, of reform for the future, made me hope that for her sake, his own, and mine, that promise would be kept ; and for some time I heard nothing to the contrary. One morning, as we sat together over our breakfast, making plans for

the day, the letters came in, and Charles Huntingdon exclaimed :—

“ Why, here is a letter from Ellen, in which she says, ‘ they are all coming down nex tweek.’ My father is not very well, and Ellen says, my mother thinks she has had gaiety enough, and that country air will revive the roses. I daresay we shall have lots of people staying here during the summer,” he continued, “ which will make t pleasant; and I am glad they are coming.”

A week after this, the house was full of people ; and the fair Ellen, looking still more shadowy, and even paler than when she left home, was again seen gliding about in those old halls ; and many young men of fashion seemed paying her attention, whether from admiration of her, or from having not much else to divert them down there, I don’t know ; but she received it all with the same inanimate manner ; and I began to think, that though decidedly pretty, she

was without any exception, one of the most stupid uninteresting girls I had ever seen. Her brother seemed very fond and proud of her, and I think she loved him deeply, though her manner never evinced being very fond of any one. Yet, how mistaken one may be in outward appearances! and what depth of feeling may be hidden under a cold calm exterior!

The dinner bell had rung one evening, and I, as usual, had repaired to the drawing-room, where Ellen was sitting, alone, near the window. I remember her whole appearance very well. She wore a dress of light blue that well suited her; her head was turned away from the door, and the long ringlets almost hid her face, which was bent down, while she pulled to pieces a large tea rose she held in her slender fingers.

"What a pity!" I said, approaching her, "to destroy what is so beautiful, Miss Huntingdon."

How she started! I remember, and a pale pink tint suffused her face and long white throat, as she turned to me.

“It is only like every thing tha is beautiful,” she said, “it does not last long.”

“But we need not destroy it before its time,” I answered.

“Perhaps not,” she said, and followed up her words with such a long-drawn sigh, that I looked at her for an instant, to see if really that sentiment, and that deep sigh, had issued from those lips usually so unmoved.

“Are you glad,” I asked, “to get back to the country?”

“*Very!*” she answered. “*You* cannot know how glad, and I only earnestly wish all our guests would take their departure and leave us quiet once more.”

Here our conversation ended, for Lady Huntingdon entered the room, and her daughter had seized a book that lay on a table near, and seemed poring over its con-

tents. A new comer had arrived, I found, a cousin of theirs, Lord Wyniett, a very plain young man, but heir to a very large fortune. He gave his arm to Miss Huntingdon, and they went in to dinner. Most likely, I thought, she is in love with her cousin, and that is the cause of her sighs; but I don't think I once remarked her during dinner, nor took any heed of her for some time afterwards, nor might I have done so but for a slight circumstance that occurred.

I was in the study one day, looking over unpaid bills that daily showered upon me, with no present means of discharging them, for the sum I had laid aside was given to my brother, and where to turn or what to do I knew not. Leaning down, with, I suppose, a countenance full of misery, and evidently much absorbed, having heard no sound, I suddenly found Miss Huntingdon close to me, appearing to be looking for a book in the bookcase, but evidently regarding me *intently*.

"Can I assist you?" I asked, and hastily rose to find the missing volume.

"Thank you," she said gently; "but in return may I ask Mr. Churchill if I can help you, you look so sad."

I thanked her with a smile, but answered,

"No! I was merely busy looking over bills and papers, not an agreeable office."

I had found the book and yet she lingered, and slightly started as the door opened, and her brother entered the room.

"What *you* here, looking over my books, Nelly," he said, "and bearing some away, too, you little thief; you told me yesterday you had lately been studying botany. Now, Mr. Churchill and I are going this afternoon in search of a rare plant we heard of: will you come?"

"Oh! gladly," she answered, with almost childish glee, and looking with beaming grateful eyes at Charlie.

"But then, cousin Fred must come also,"

he rejoined, " or mamma will not be pleased. and will perhaps prevent your going with us."

" Oh ! but that will spoil all the pleasure," she said quickly ; " but if I may not go without him let him come, by all means."

" You know, now, you are dying to have him with you," said Charlie, looking with such an absurd expression of face at his sister, who answered—

" You know I don't like him ; you know he bores me to death. I will run away if I am to be worried in this way."

Her face flushed up, and tears stood in her eyes, while her hand, that leant upon the table, shook visibly. Her brother then kissed and soothed her, telling her he would make Lady Huntingdon agree to her accompanying us. That afternoon she did walk with us, and Lord Wyniett likewise ; and her mother was satisfied. I hope her cousin was also, but she treated him with great coldness, and addressed all her conversation to me. I looked at her once or twice

to see if it could be the same cold silent girl that before her parents sat so still and unconcerned, and that now talked and laughed, full of life and joy. I was puzzled, but began from that time to take more interest in her, and pitied her for being evidently forced into a marriage with her cousin, whom she did not love. And now they often walked and rode with us, and she always seemed cheerful and content. But let me hasten to the close of this wretched story.

I was about to leave the Huntingdons for a month, and visit friends in London; and it was the evening before my departure. I sat near the piano while Miss Huntingdon sang. She sang well, and had been well-taught, but that night her voice trembled much, and when she looked round, her face was very white: she turned and begged of me to sing. I hesitated, but, on Lady Huntingdon joining in the request, I at last complied.

Most of the company were grouped about in different parts of the room, and were talking, excepting a few whom real love of music had made silent: but Ellen Huntingdon sat not far from the piano on a low ottoman. I never saw such a rapt expression as there was in her face, seeming not to heed the crowd around her, nor busy hum of voices. But she rose slowly, moved to a side door that opened into the conservatory, and vanished, but with faint faltering steps. Without considering the strange appearance it might have, if noticed, which fortunately I found was not the case, I followed her. She was leaning against one of the large white pillars, the many beautiful hanging flowers that clustered round it falling and seeming to mingle with her long fair hair, and for the first time, I thought her lovely.

"Do not come here," she said, faintly, "or they will follow you and crowd round me: I feel so ill, I could not stay among them."

"I thought you were ill, and for that reason I followed you," I said. "You look *very* pale."

"I must; I feel so ill," she answered; "but who cares what I suffer; what I feel?"

I bade her not speak in that strain. Was she not liked, loved, courted, admired by all? what could she wish for more? Ah! if she knew what others suffered, her lot would seem blessed while she was rich and powerful.

"I wish that I were poor," she exclaimed, "*then* I might act as I chose—*now* I am a slave to others; but I shall not live long, I hope," she exclaimed, still more bitterly, as, clasping her hands, she paced up and down, till the door opened and her mother stood before her, with such an angry expression in her face, that Miss Huntingdon fainted, and fell ere I could reach her.

"What is all this, Mr. Churchill?" she asked in an angry tone, after I had suc-

ceeded in lifting the senseless girl into the air. "What was Ellen doing here?"

"I observed," I answered, coldly, "what no one else seemed to observe, that your daughter looked very pale and ill, and I followed her hither to ascertain if she had fainted."

My manner was so calm that evidently Lady Huntingdon was assured I had no other motive than the one alleged; no had I, and she begged of me to return to the drawing-room. She then called for a servant to carry Miss Huntingdon up stairs, and I saw her no more that evening.

The next morning I left at an early hour, and was sorry to learn from one of the servants that Miss Huntingdon was very ill.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN Charlie wrote to me, he did not mention his sister, except to say she had at last yielded to the entreaties of her parents, and engaged herself to Lord Wyniett. I own the news rather surprised me, after the extraordinary coldness, and almost dislike, she evinced towards him, and her vehement words, the last night I had conversed with her ; but I hoped she had grown fond of him ; and after a day or so I ceased to think about it ; so little impression had she made on my heart.

My visit passed quickly and pleasantly.

I now began to hope Eldred might improve, as he seemed to have become much steadier and more rational. Alas! they were still in difficulties; and although I knew he had brought it on himself, I could not help feeling for him.

It was the end of August when I returned, the evening before Miss Huntingdon's marriage; and a beautiful evening it was. When I reached the house, I found Charlie had gone out riding with his father; but Lady Huntingdon was in the drawing-room, very busy; and she evidently received my congratulations with pride and pleasure.

"Ellen is out walking," she said, "but I suppose will be in presently."

I saw she was much occupied: I left the room, therefore, and wandered into the grounds.

What possessed me to turn down that very path you chose the other day, I know not; for it was one I seldom entered, leading to that dark pool that lies in shade and

gloom. I little knew, as I walked unheedingly along, how every step led me on to what has caused my misery! I saw some one sitting on a low bench near the ground, and sounds of weeping came to me, the evening before her marriage, too, sitting there, alone, and in tears, and such tears! as though the heart within was well nigh broken with its anguish!

I went up to her, endeavoured to sooth her, learnt from her lips how hateful this marriage was to her! how she longed to escape it! could I help her? Fool that I was; for some time I never saw it, never saw that this unfortunate girl loved me; but when, suddenly, the thought did come, as in every one's life comes a moment of vanity, so did it come to me. This girl of high birth, wealth, and beauty, whom all courted and admired, thrusting her confidence on me, entreating my aid, telling me she would gladly die ere the morning dawned, and not able to disguise her feeling

for me, caused me to tell her I would care for her, I would help her : how I wished I was in a position to offer her a home ! but I was *poor, unknown, dependent* ! so I ran on. But now the tears vanished : how her pale face lit up with sudden joy, as she told me that with *me* she cared not what privations she bore ; my love was all-sufficient. *My love !*

No sooner had I uttered the fatal words, than I repented them : I did not *love* her : pity, friendship, *regard*—but *love*—no !

Still, I loved no other, and might love her in time, won by her devotion, though, in my more sober moments, I might have despised her for showing it so plainly. Then her proud and worldly parents, what would they think of such a marriage ? She rose slowly : she drew from her finger that fatal ring, and placing it on mine, said,—

‘ Swear you will never desert me ! ’ and I swore a solemn oath.”

Here Mr. Churchill paused; and I had only strength to say:—

“And it shall not be broken.”

“It is broken *now*,” he answered; “when I broke my faith in heart to her, what matters the mere form of words?”

“Every thing,” I replied, firmly, “you said you cared for her; you swore never to desert her: do you think *I* would break that poor girl’s heart? Oh!” I continued, turning from him, “why did you not tell me this before? why let me feel what I am feeling now? Ellen Huntingdon! why do you stand there between me and Heaven? you, who possessed *all*! I had nothing but his love—and *now*!”

“Now, mine for ever! look up, Inez, my own! lean upon my heart; here shall be your refuge: the world may pass us by, in its pleasure and its scorn; come!”

He was going to press me nearer in his embrace, but I sprang from him, and with a wild bitter cry, ran, it mattered not where.

It seemed as though fresh strength was given to me. I ran hastily through the deep tangled wood, and there I lay with my face hidden in the long grass till I was strong in heart and will to say with truth, "I cannot be your wife." In my agony I had not waited to hear the end of his story. He was sitting in the garden when I retraced my steps, alone, deep in thought; but he looked up as I approached, and asked why I had left him; for he had searched vainly for me.

"I left you," I replied, "because my brain could bear no more torturing just then: now I am calm, and can listen to the end."

"Oh! it can soon be told," he answered. "I walked back with Ellen, who trembled like an aspen leaf at every sound, evidently dreading the anger of her parents, for told they must be; and then the thought of her marriage next morning, for which everything was arranged, seemed to distract her.

I did not feel it in the same way : I seemed more like one who, though not feeling the thing, still determined on going resolutely through with it. I felt as if I were going on boldly to face death, no shrinking from it, no fear ; and yet such hopeless misery ! And we walked straight to the drawing-room, where Ellen, *weak* to the last, entered the room only to fall senseless. I lifted her up and with amazing calmness said— ‘ It is but right to tell you, Lady Huntingdon, your daughter loves me. I shall marry her : nothing can prevent it now.’ I did not tell Lady Huntingdon *I* loved Ellen ; that I feared her anger, and knew there was no hope, and that I was distracted in consequence. No ! I stood there so calm that the mother stood looking at me, then at her daughter, as if she dreamt for a few moments, and then such a torrent of words ! I will not repeat them ; anger, scorn, contempt, and invective, one heaped on the other, and all directed to me. Ellen, who

had now recovered from her fainting fit, rose from the sofa, and cried—‘It is not his fault: he never paid me attention: he never asked me to break my faith to my cousin, and marry him.’ ‘Then what in the name of heaven do you mean, girl?’ asked Lady Huntingdon, with a look and manner I shall never forget. ‘I mean that I love Mr. Churchill; that I will give up *all* for him; that I would sooner die a thousand times over than marry my cousin; that no power shall prevent me from acting as I wish.’ Then, I remember how she was borne from the room amid torrents of abuse and indignation; and I was left to relate what had passed. Yes, I had to plead for what I did not feel; to appear guilty for what I never should have spoken, but for Ellen. I think Lady Huntingdon guessed as much. With a woman’s quickness of perception she saw on whose side the love was; but evidently thought worldly considerations influenced me: she little knew how willingly, gladly, I would have relin-

quished all claim to her daughter's hand, had not honour and feeling for her bound me ; as I had begun, so would I go on with it, even to the sacrifice of my own feelings. You can imagine what passed, perhaps, the horror and rage of Sir Charles Huntingdon, when he heard the awful startling intelligence that *his* daughter had engaged herself to her brother's tutor ; with what hauteur he bade me leave his house for ever, hardly deigning to listen to my defence of what he thought so dreadful, whilst I stood trembling with pride before him, not venturing to speak lest my rage should cause me to utter words that would have dragged me down to his level. Bowing low, I left the room, and an hour afterwards, the house ; and then came a feeling of freedom and of happiness ; but she whom I had left without a word of farewell, with no one near to breathe a kind thought, or alleviate her bitter grief ; what would become of her ? Was I not selfish in thus leaving her ? I

determined, instantly on arriving in town, to write to her : in her hands would I leave it to decide our fate, and whatever she resolved on I would agree to. How many letters I wrote and tore before I sent one. I could not write coldly, and show no feeling, to one whose whole heart seemed to be centered in me ; yet how could I write with a lover's fervour, when it was not felt ? Writing very kindly, therefore, without any great profession of feeling, which, if I saw her again, she would perceive was wanting, I despatched my letter, and anxiously awaited her reply.

Some days passed in suspense for an answer. When it did come it was so full of real grief, not alone on her own account, but for the way in which I had been treated, that I pitied and almost loved her for it ; the more at hearing how really ill she was and how her parents still insisted on her marrying Lord Wyniett, from whom the truth had been veiled, and who thought

her sudden illness had caused his marriage to be postponed. She wrote, that she had bribed her own servant to post her letter for her, and told me that if it were found out that she had written, her suffering would be still greater, and that no power on earth should force her to give me up. Thus did she write, and as I read I wondered that one with so retiring a manner, and so much weakness of character, should, at the same time, be so determined.

I don't know how it happened, whether her correspondence had been at last discovered, but she ceased to write, and I heard from good authority that Miss Huntingdon was dangerously ill; that the family had gone abroad on her account, fearing she was rapidly falling into a decline. She had a painfully delicate appearance, and I now dreaded what I might hear. I heard nothing for many weeks.

And now whither was I to turn, thus suddenly deprived of what had seemed so

advantageous, and yet had *proved* so much the reverse. No *more* trials for *me*, as tutor in great mens' houses, no, I would work again sedulously at the bar, and turn the talents I possessed to account. I steadily adhered to this resolve, and found success crown my efforts. And now, as if in reward for my steadier course of life, relief also came in the shape of nine thousand pounds, left to me by the death of my mother's only sister, who, dying unmarried, divided her fortune between me and Eldred. Thus suddenly did fortune smile on us both, after many dark years of reverses and suffering. And my conduct for the future should prove my thankfulness for this unexpected help in time of need. It was one day, early in December last, that I received a letter from Lady Huntingdon; to my surprise and consternation it was to ask, almost to *entreat* me to visit them at Pisa. She spoke in almost despairing tones of her daughter's health, and though she did not

say my presence would effect a cure, perhaps her pride not allowing her to do so, the whole tenor of the letter led me to think such was the case. My refusal to accept their invitation was calm and polite. I now could be proud as they had been, and show them that a gentleman was not thus to be treated at their will or caprice; concluding my letter with real sorrow and concern at Miss Huntingdon's state of health, I quietly waited for what might ensue. No answer came, and most of the winter passed. Society again had charms for me, and I entered into it once more, though not in the wild and reckless way of former days. On returning one night from a large and gay party, I walked into my sitting-room to fetch something I had left there, when, by the dim firelight, I saw some one standing by it, and on the intruder turning round, I was face to face with Charles Huntingdon. He looked pale, ill, and agitated, and grasped my hand warmly at my start on seeing him,

and enquiry as to what had brought him to England, he answered, with his usual frank charming manner—‘ I have come to ask you to accompany me back to Italy. You were right in refusing at first : my father and mother treated you shamefully ; I blush to think of it ; but, for my sake, come. Ellen loves you so ; she is, I fear, dying. Will you not come and see her before she leaves us ?’ Poor Charlie ! I can see him now, his fine face looking at me with so much feeling expressed in every feature, while tears stood in his eyes, waiting my reply. ‘ Come, only to hasten Ellen’s death,’ I answered ; ‘ be again insulted ?’ I was going to add ; ‘ again utter words and vows I do not feel ;’ but I checked the words at his interruption of ‘ It shall never happen again. Here,’ he continued, drawing a letter from his pocket, ‘ read this, and learn how they now lament their cruelty and injustice.’ I read it attentively, and then said —‘ I will go back with you——’

The words came reluctantly, slowly; the heart had not uttered them; no love breathed through them: I felt their strangeness, their coldness, and I turned away. Charlie gazed at me for a few moments, very silent; yet a life of thought seemed to pass over his brow, and look out of his clear eyes into mine; they seemed to read something of my strange fate, and the thoughts that occupied me. He said, hesitatingly, 'Yes, you will come; you are generous and forgiving: may you find the happiness you deserve!' Then, after awhile, he said—'Can you be ready by to-morrow? if so, we will start.' I nodded assent, and he left me. Well, Inez, you may perhaps guess all that followed; how I found Ellen pale, ill, and seemingly sinking fast; and how grieved I felt for her. I cannot easily forget our meeting; how she wept! and yet to see me again seemed to give her strength and life. After awhile a faint tinge of colour came to that deathlike face; faint

smiles played on her small pale lips. Sir Charles and Lady Huntingdon were all kindness and civility, and I plainly perceived my presence had been the last hope to save their child. Entreaties and threats they had found of no avail: Ellen was equally determined: she would not marry Lord Wyniett nor give me up. Strange! she did not see my coldness; that pride had not made her feel that my affection had not been great, or I should not have let so many months elapse without endeavouring to gain tidings of her. Each day she grew better and stronger. We were engaged under the sanction of her parents; I need not say *sanction*; they proposed it to me. Her fortune was more than sufficient, and when I left them they told me they should return in August, and we were to have been married in October."

"That cannot be now," he continued, "I have known you since, and loved you: all must be relinquished for you."

I merely shook my head, and we walked to the house in silence. My excess of misery did not enable me even to shed a tear. A dead weight lay on my heart; I could scarce breathe, much less speak.

CHAPTER XVII.

I LISTENED, in turn, to despair and entreaties from Mr. Churchill, yet my path was clearly marked; I would not swerve from it.

“By thus refusing me,” he said, “you cause both of us acute suffering; and the sin of marrying, when I do not love, must rest upon you: you may live to repent it.”

“No, I shall not,” I answered, calmly; “we do not repent when we act from duty and right principle. I may for a long time be unhappy; but, Edward,” I added, earnestly, “should I not be far *more* unhappy if

I saw Miss Huntingdon wretched and dying young, from your desertion of her; if I heard your name, so precious to me, breathed in contempt, and coupled with dishonour? Think of it as I do, and the consciousness of acting rightly will bring peace at last to your troubled heart."

I cannot tell whether, after a time, I might not have yielded to all his arguments and entreaties, the conflict in my mind being almost too much for human strength to conquer, left, too, as I was, at seventeen, with no friend, or adviser, or guide, had not an unforeseen event suddenly occurred, to decide it for me. The Huntingdons had actually arrived, and a note full of affection and entreaty that Mr. Churchill would come instantly, was put into his hand. He read it, handed it to me, with a look which I shall never forget; it seemed to say now *decide*. After reading it I said quietly—

"You must go at once: it is right to go."

"Right to go, Inez?"

How can I attempt to describe the agony of his pale face as he repeated my words.

“Is it right thus to act a false part, while every hope, every thought of mine is resting upon you?”

“And yet,” I replied, “that unfortunate girl, just rescued from an early death, loves you, and anxiously awaits your coming. How can you tell her you do not love her?”

Mr. Churchill paced up and down the room; he talked like one distracted, till, at length, he snatched some letter-paper from the table, saying:—

“I will write the whole truth to Ellen, and tell her I can never see her again.”

He would have done so, but I seized his hands, and on my knees, in tears, made him at last promise he would never desert Ellen Huntingdon till she, of her own accord, gave him up. All I then urged and prayed for, every feeling both for him and me, came back a thousand times in torturing accents to my broken heart. Yet I to stand

in his way ! I to prevent him marrying one who could raise him in the world's estimation ; one who loved him, if not more unselfishly, as much as I did ; one lovely, too, and gentle ! Could I be the one to blast her young life as with a plague spot, so deadly would the blow fall ! No ! they were engaged, and they should marry ; and, as for the last time Mr. Churchill pressed me to his heart with wild broken expressions of anguish and despair, I wished that we might be folded in death.

When he left the house, Miss Churchill entered the room, and commenced, for the first time, speaking of the approaching marriage. I sat, as if listening, but a train of recollections came back to me, of our rambles together ; his accents of love ; his unhappiness ; his deep thrilling tones ; the music of his voice ; all ! all gone for ever ! I seemed like one grappling with some spirit whose power was such that I grew weak and faint ; a mist spread before my

eyes ; I walked from the room like one in a dream. I must just have had strength permitted me to reach the room. I woke from my trance, stupified, stunned : there was a faint glimmer of light through the casement. I bathed my face, and then leaned against the window ; the cool night air blew on me and restored me to consciousness. There was no one near—all was still—I gazed round my little room—I was alone now in the wide world, and had, of my own will, cast from me the only real love that had been granted me. I took Mrs. Wentworth's locket from my neck, thinking of the time she had sat beside me. Where was she now ? had her agonized heart found rest ? not if she watched over me that night, or if sorrow can be felt for those who mourn.

I did not see Mr. Churchill that evening, as I before mentioned ; and the next morning remained in my room, feeling ill ; and a kind of dread of meeting any one, kept me there till I heard his voice calling me. I

ran hastily down stairs to where he stood awaiting me, looking much agitated. He seized my hands, and whispered :—

“ They are in the drawing-room ; go, Inez, and make my wife’s acquaintance.”

“ You look pale and ill ; have you had no rest ?”

“ Rest, Inez ?” he answered mournfully, “ only the good find rest.”

“ Then you will find it at last, Edward, for you are acting rightly.”

“ *Acting*, indeed !” he said, “ and must for ever act, I fear,” he added bitterly. We entered the room together. I came so calmly in, no one would have known the conflict, the agony of heart we both felt ; and this is a thing that so often strikes me, the power we all have of hiding at times the real state of our feelings and the artificial unreal existence we dwell in and amongst.

Ellen Huntingdon sat there, by the window, looking the perfection of elegance and

good taste ; for her dress, though simple, was perfectly adapted to her figure and complexion, her hair hanging in loose ringlets over her shoulders ; her face, though slight and delicate, lit up with happy smiles ; whilst I, in my black dress, my hair parted plainly, and my eyes dim from weeping, sat near her, asking question after question, seeming to listen with some interest to the various topics discussed. Mr. Churchill stood near ; and as he glanced on both, I felt indeed the sacrifice he was making ; every look told me I was loved. But Ellen noted it not : strange delusion ! and yet it was not wilful blindness. She did not see the trouble. I was glad when the whole party rose to depart : Mr. Churchill accompanied them to the gate, where the carriage waited. I wondered he could not love her, gentle, lovely, and engaging as she seemed to me ; and the earnest affectionate look she cast on him as he gave her his arm, on leaving the cottage, showed me plainly her

great devotion to him. No reciprocal feeling or look of love rested upon her, deluded girl! and yet real pity for her was felt, when, on his returning to the room, I said:—

“It is strange Miss Huntingdon does not notice your cold manner towards her: I wish you could, for her sake, throw more warmth into it; show her some affection.”

“It is not *strange*,” he answered sadly, “do you not perceive, that though she has feeling, she has no sense? but never mind,” he added, “it is better she should be blind, if she will marry me: she may thank heaven for not having awarded her those generally inestimable benefits.”

“I hope she will never repent her marriage,” I said, “in time you will love her; she has amiability and great affection for you.”

“Yes, she has all that,” he answered, “and yet, Inez, I never loved her; I have a regard for her, but no love. Yesterday,

Inez, when I mentioned your forlorn condition to Ellen, she begged of me, in her name and my own, to ask you to come to us when we are married: you will come; will you not?’

“Not now, Edward,” I answered weeping: “when time has softened this trial to us, when I feel I *can* come, and I know that you are happy, I may come once more among you: promise me you will not press it, for some time at least,” I added, supplicatingly.

“You will wait till I am *happy*,” he said, laying stress on the word “happy,” and looking at me earnestly the while, “mark me,” he added, “I may recover, in time, from the sharpness of this grief, and become hardened to it: worldly pleasures may have their influence, riches their attractions; I may, as you say, love Ellen in time, and so gain what many would call *happiness*; but beneath all *that*, will lie the hard deep lonely grief that no time can change, no mere

surface happiness lighten or smooth. I know the lot portioned out to me; I will bear it quietly, even patiently, as you have asked me, but if you wait to come to us till I am *happy*, you and I will meet no more:" he pressed my hand, rose abruptly, and quitted the room.

I pondered long and sadly over Edward Churchill's words: they seemed to haunt me; and for Ellen Huntingdon I could not bear to think that such affection as she showed should meet with so chilling a return. She was so kind and gracious in her manner to me, also, that I felt still more grieved that I should, innocently, be the cause of so much suffering. We spent the evening with the Huntingdons; and when, after wandering in the grounds, I was alone with Ellen, she said:—

"I hope, Miss Wentworth, we may become great friends: I have heard so much of you from Edward, and I now beg you will, when we have a home to offer you, share it

with us as long as ever you feel inclined : it will be conferring a great favour, if you will promise me to do this."

Her manner evinced so much kindness of feeling, so much delicacy and truth, that, as I pressed her hand and thanked her, I knew not what reply to make : at last, with faltering tone, and tears, I could not restrain gushing from my eyes, I told her, " I should be happy to stay with them now and then—but——"

" But *what ?*" she said, looking at me ; " you think I am not sincere in what I ask ; that we neither of us wish it : that is why you thus hesitate."

" Indeed, it is not," I answered ; " I know you are sincere ; but I must not always be thus dependant upon others. I have lately thought of trying, at all events, to find some one wishing for a companion whom I might really like to live with."

" What ! some invalid old lady, I suppose," answered Ellen, " no I won't hear of your

being moped to death. I shall bring you out, and till you marry, you must remain with us; remember, if Edward orders you, you must obey him: he is your *guardian*."

I thought of when he had said the same words: I merely shook my head, and smiled.

"You will consent," she said, "and let me go and tell dearest Edward so: you don't know how kind, clever, and perfect he is, or how much he has borne for me."

"I *can* believe it," I said.

"Ah! but wait till I tell you some day of the dreadful scenes that occurred, of how unkindly he was treated! how, notwithstanding all that, he came to see me, and at last won papa's consent. You must not judge of his manner, which is somewhat reserved, for he never at any time paid me much attention, or appeared in love with me: indeed, I had hardly dared hope he cared for me; but now I am the happiest girl that ever lived, for I know he cares for

me ; and he is so delightful, and so handsome : don't you think so ?”

“ Yes,” I replied, turning to examine some jewels that lay on the table.

“ I daresay,” she continued, “ you think him too old ; but I don't like such very young men. Edward is young-looking, though, for two-and-thirty, and there is so much expression in the face : do you not think so ?”

“ Yes,” I again replied, “ and the expression is, with *him*, a true index to the mind.”

“ And yet,” said Ellen, as if musing to herself, “ I cannot help thinking you do not like him much ; you act and look as if you were afraid of him ; I suppose all girls are of their guardians : it sounds disagreeable ; but you must not let that idea take possession of you ; for I wish you to feel how good and charming he is. Help me to choose a ring for him,” she continued, turning over a number of handsome rings ; “ for I wish

to have my hair put in one : I did give him a ring once ; but he lost it." She little knew that I had seen her ring cast from him into that dark pool of water ; and that he had wished to cast her away likewise for ever.

" This is beautiful," I said, taking up one of the rings, and examining it.

" Yes, it is, and we will decide upon it : that I gave him was a blue one."

" I remember it well."

" Did you find out that *I* had given it to him ? and did he ever speak of me, to you ? what did he say ?"

" He told me of his engagement to you, and described you exactly."

" I suppose," said Ellen, laughing, " he said what all people do when they are in love, and very happy. I am perhaps foolish to ask you these questions ; but all I wish to know is, would you have found out he was in love with anyone before he told you ?"

" I thought he was in love, certainly," I

answered, "but will he not be wondering where you are?" I pursued, feeling much perplexed at her close questioning: "had we not better go down stairs?"

We both left the room and descended to the drawing-room, where Edward Churchill sat awaiting us. I saw her go up to him and whisper something in his ear. I fancied it was to make him promise to urge me still more to stay with them when they were married, on which he cast a mingled look of happiness and of trouble upon me.

"Don't look so grave," said Ellen; "we shall all be so happy, and lead such a merry life together."

"I hope we may be very happy," he answered; "you look full of animation, so different from what you did on our first acquaintance, Ellen."

"Because *then* I was not happy, and did not know you cared for me; *now* I am convinced of your love and have nothing left to wish for."

He rose up hastily and walked to the piano, and I, knowing how his singing moved me, left the room, while Ellen sat in perfect happiness, listening. Oh! who could have been cruel enough to have torn the veil from her eyes, and laid the truth, in all its bitterness, bare before her.

Their marriage was to take place almost immediately. Lady Huntingdon, Ellen, and Mr. Churchill left us for a few days to arrange different matters in London. Their absence was a great relief to me. I had no longer, then, to assume a cheerfulness I did not feel, and each day I impatiently awaited Valerie's answer, to hear whether I could leave before the wedding took place. The letter came at last; very cold and stiff it was, unlike the note of a young girl. She was sorry they could not receive me just then, the house being full of company, in consequence of the London season being over, and many friends coming to them. Towards the winter, however, she hoped I

would come and stay as long as I felt disposed, with them; wrote of the gaiety in prospect; was glad to hear I was happy with my guardian, and concluded by saying her time was fully occupied, and she had no leisure for writing. So now I had no hope left: remain for a time I must, and many tears I shed as I took my solitary walk that day. If I could have entered into the gaiety she mentioned, it must, at all events for a time, have pleased me, and diverted my thoughts. Why was I then denied what she looked forward to with so much pleasure? *I* had nothing to divert my miserable thoughts; everything around served but to remind me of my lost happiness, and Miss Churchill, whom every day I disliked more, was for a time my only companion. She talked of her nephew's marriage with evident pride and pleasure.

“It will be such a good thing for him,” she said, “and I am happy to think he has not, like his elder brother, been fool enough

to fall in love with, and marry some portionless girl: money is, after all, the only essential thing in life, and if people will marry, they had better marry richly. For my part, I think a single life much to be preferred, and with all the numerous offers I had, I thought it far wiser to remain as I was, though I fear I broke many hearts in consequence."

"How very distressing!" I answered, turning away to hide my laughter.

"Distressing!" she repeated, "indeed it was; if you were old enough to hear the particulars, I would relate them, but young peoples' minds should not be poisoned with romance and love."

I merely nodded an assent to her wise and prudent remark, and left her to indulge in the evening nap she was always too ready for, and hastened to pore over some of the books we used at one time to read together. The days passed stupidly enough, certainly, but free from much that was painful. I

did not think, as many do after a first disappointment, that I should never care for anyone again. I was almost too young to think of Mr. Churchill with any settled feeling of that kind: I only knew that he had more power over me than anyone else; that his praise or blame moved me more, and that he loved me. I think had I been some years older I should have felt his insufficiency to guide me; for, even when I loved him most, I saw plainly the great defect in his character: he lacked the steady unflinching principle of right that alone ensures us respect and real happiness; and to lead and educate a mind ardent and enthusiastic as mine, such a prop to lean on would not have sufficed. I think he never knew quite how much I had cared for him, nor how quietly in my own heart I bore my trial, never revealing what had passed between us, never thrusting myself into his society, though taxed by Ellen with ingratitude and dislike of one whom she

naturally thought all goodness, I cannot dilate upon all this, or the suffering I bore, but will dwell only on what was good in him, and on his grief, which was long and bitter.

They only arrived home two days before the wedding. Ellen told me I must place her marriage-wreath on ! so I was singled out to deck the bride of him I loved. As we talked together on the evening of their arrival, I felt such a cold feeling at my heart, and, turning away, leaned out of the window ; there was a slight rustle of the trees, which were tinged with the setting sun, for now autumn had come, and the evenings closed early. The clear air of a September night blew freshly in upon us as we sat there, long conversing on the various arrangements for the future ; even till the moon rose, when Mr. Churchill called out to us from below, and Ellen, at the sound, fled like a cloud, so all-powerful was that voice to her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE following evening I had put on my bonnet, with the intention of meeting Edward Churchill, who said he should be at the cottage at six o'clock. I had promised to meet him, as he had various matters to talk over with me, and I was passing through the drawing-room towards the open window, when Miss Churchill accosted me.

“ I want you,” she said, “ to arrange a little matter with me about my dress that I intend wearing at the wedding; just come into my room, will you?”

“ Would it do when I come in ?” I asked, hesitatingly.

“ What !” she answered, “ what did you say ?”

I repeated my words.

“ Oh, pray never mind !” she replied, with a dignified shake of her head. “ I daresay I can find some one who will be kind and obliging enough to assist me.”

“ I shall be very glad to render you any service,” I said ; “ only just at this moment I was going out ; but if you will show me your dress I will see what I can do.”

She led the way, and pointed to a green satin dress.

“ I merely wish that these lace ruffles should be put to the sleeves.”

I took up the lace and began arranging it, knowing, at the same time, that by doing so I should be late to meet Mr. Churchill, and so incur his displeasure. I felt unhappy and out of temper.

“ It’s a *lovely* thing, is it not ?” asked

Miss Churchill, "and has kept its colour so well."

I thought it frightful, but dared not say so, the shade of green being ugly and faded-looking; by its make it looked very much as if it had come out of Noah's ark. I, however, put the lace on, and was joyfully moving towards the door, when she said, after thanking me—

"Would you kindly give a look also to my bonnet?" and before my wondering gaze she drew forth, and held up for inspection, an enormous yellow crape bonnet. "All it needs," she added, "is to be trimmed with these flowers: please put them near the top, and a quantity inside: flowers become me so much".

Those she had chosen were the largest poppies and corn-flowers, sticking up in a peculiar fashion, certainly in a way I had never seen them growing. With, I am sure, the air of a martyr, I again commenced working, longing to tell the cross old thing

I would willingly have sat up all night to add to the ugliness of her bonnet, but that *now* every moment was precious to me, but what might she not have said had I dared to do so? No, I quietly submitted to her will, and then ran hastily through the garden to the lane, where Mr. Churchill stood waiting. He remained for a moment without speaking, a sort of reproachful expression on his face, and a settled compressed look of suffering, as though nothing could alter it *now*; like one doomed, and for whom there could be no escape. I told him the cause of my delay; of Miss Churchill's green dress and yellow bonnet. I almost laughed as the vision of poppies and cornflowers rose before me: he smiled faintly, and then said—

“ Well, we have not many minutes to be together, Inez. I am beginning a dark and dreary journey—where will it end?”

I stood by him mute; no answer came to comfort him, for I *felt* too much to *speak*.

“ My little Inez,” he continued, “ my ward and companion, we shall now indeed be separated ; but I will strive to do my duty. You have asked it, therefore it shall be done.”

“ May God help you to keep this promise faithfully,” I said at last, as we stood solemnly together under the clear face of heaven, with only the invisible world looking on our sorrow. I at last tore myself from him and stood near, trembling. The wind moaned amid the dark fir trees with a sighing restless sound : he leaned against them : his agony at last was such, that I came near to him and prayed him to be calm, and then, silent, hand in hand, we walked to the little gate of the cottage, where, with one heart-broken sigh, he left me.

I had decided on going with Miss Churchill to their marriage the following morning, instead of sleeping at the Huntingdons’ ; and I lay that night sleepless

and despairing, not as the young and happy bridesmaid of a young and lovely bride ; yet not so much did I mourn for myself or my own feelings, as for him I loved. Almost like one in a dream I stood some hours after at the altar. I had placed the orange wreath on the brow of the fair bride ; my hands arranged the long white veil, and there she stood, in her graceful beauty, by her husband's side, and I, with my light gay dress, her gift to me, stood amid the happy group of bridesmaids, watching the ceremony proceed that tore us two asunder, and bound him for life. And when concluded, what was there in that one look he cast on me ? Oh ! fatal mystery of life ! that one look might have revealed all. Yet, I hoped on.

The six weeks they were absent, those weeks of long weary trial to me, I will not dwell upon. Alone with Miss Churchill in that quiet stillness, and with no variation either of pain or pleasure to dispel the

gloom, I felt indeed as if my young life was crushed, and all my senses for a time deadened. It was not misery of that kind whence springs excitement and desperation; bearing us on to stern endurance of what we suffer. Mine was not that; I went about my usual pursuits in a quiet mechanical manner. I talked to my companion, as if no recent unhappiness had befallen me, in a cheerful lively manner, and my replies to Ellen's letters were written in the same strain. My walks were over hill and dale, in the thick wood and deep lanes, but never to the shore: the sight and sound of those rolling restless waves made my poor heart sick, bearing as it seemed to me, on their wild surf, the spirit of my lost love, and all my heart's joy. But one stormy evening when the tide rolled high, and the wind roared and swept the bright leaves far and wide from the branches, I hurried to the shore, and my eyes resting on the well-remembered spot, I shed, for the first

time, copious burning tears. Little should I have cared then had those mountain waves swept nearer and borne my aching troubled heart to rest, so fraught with uncertainty and joylessness seemed my future, and so dreary and lifeless the present; then fancy led me back, and I was once more pressed in his arms, and heart to heart echoing back our love. That evening was the last I watched, for many months, that rolling tide. The following morning brought new ideas, a change of scene and of life, for a letter from Valerie came, telling me that her father would come to the cottage the following day, and take me to Wentworth Court. The letter was brief and evidently written in haste, but, glad to escape ere Edward and Ellen returned to the new home they had chosen, I prepared to depart, and once more enter into what had a painful remembrance, but which I was determined to try again, rather than remain where I was.

I told Miss Churchill my plans, and pre-

pared to depart with my uncle the following day. I had not fancied his wife's death would have altered him much, or weighed upon his spirits. I was surprised therefore, when the next morning brought him to the cottage, to see how careworn he had become, and with what a subdued and saddened manner he met me. He scarcely tasted his breakfast, and as soon as the horses were rested he hurried me off. It was a still grey kind of evening, such as we often have in autumn, when I first saw Wentworth Court. It was situated in one of the prettiest parts of Sussex, about two miles from a rural peaceful village, a regular old-fashioned English village, such as I like to see. The scenery was not wild and romantic, like that I had just quitted; winding lanes, broad meadows, and woods, were the chief characteristic of the scene now before me. Here and there a wild dell or chine, whose sides were clothed with wood and rock, with still streams in the hollow, would serve as a

contrast to the surrounding scenery, but the general aspect of the country was rural, with little that was striking or very picturesque : yet, which, with its calm meadows, large trees, tinted now with autumn hues, seemed to inspire me with a kind of peace I could not have felt within the sound of the rolling sea. The old house gleamed forth in the dim twilight, as we drove up the long winding avenue to the hill on which Wentworth Court was situated, and I felt that, even if not happy with Valerie, I could wander in those beautiful grounds unheeded ; and surely in those old quaint rooms there must be peace and quiet.

I entered a large oak hall, from whose ancient walls old faces looked down on me, faces that perhaps once had beamed with glad and happy smiles, in welcome of some loving heart, or mused in melancholy dreaming over the long fields, mourning for the loved ones that would never smile on them again, till, in other purer regions, they would

meet once more where there will be no death. Yes, as I gazed on them I almost forgot Valerie's existence, carried back as I was to other times, till her voice came ringing on my ears; and she soon entered the hall, arm-in-arm with another girl. Coming forward with her usual careless air, she said—

“ My dear child, I am very glad you are come; but, no doubt, like me, you will soon be moped to death in this old house; but I shall do my best to amuse you. Let me introduce Miss St. Leger to you.”

A few minutes afterwards, Miss St. Leger having left the room, I asked :—

“ Who is she, Valerie? She is an elegant-looking girl.”

“ She is a daughter of Lord Falconhurst's,” answered Valerie, “ and her eldest brother is very soon coming here for the shooting.”

“ Is he a pleasant person?” I asked.

She replied, after a moment's hesitation,

“ Yes, but a perfect idiot ; and so is she, for the matter of that.”

“ And is there any one else staying here ?”

Oh ! how Valerie turned from me ! how her eye-lids trembled, and her face flushed with some strong feeling, as she answered,

“ Only one or two others ;” and drawing my arm within hers, she led me to my room without speaking. I asked no more questions : I knew Valerie well enough to keep silence.

“ And your guardian ?” she asked, when she again spoke, “ how did you get on with him ?”

With great mastery over myself, I answered :—

“ Very well indeed ; he is married now, and his wife is a kind friend to me.”

“ Well, that is lucky for you,” she answered quickly, “ but I have heard it reported that Mr. Churchill married her

entirely for her money, and does not care for her : is this true ?”

“ It is not true,” I replied ; and perhaps there was a slight annoyance in the tone in which I said it, for Valerie, with a significant look, said, “ it was only what I heard : so it really was a love match.”

“ The love is more on her side than his,” I replied, “ but at the same time Mr. Churchill did not marry her for her fortune.”

Valerie soon left me ; and sitting down, I burst into tears : how often must I hear his name thus mentioned ? how often say what I knew in a measure was false, or at least widely separate from what I knew to be the fact ? yet, if I spoke the exact truth, what untold misery might not arise from a few unguarded words ! Left to myself, at seventeen, I had to steer, as best I could, through what would have puzzled many an older and wiser head than mine.

Still, Valerie seemed kinder in manner ;

and if only left in peace, my visit to Wentworth Court might be pleasanter than I had anticipated. Drying my tears, I descended to the drawing-room. There was only one person in the apartment, and that one a stranger to me. There was something so singularly striking and interesting in the appearance of the sole occupant of that spacious room, that I cannot easily forget it. Just hastily, as if putting a few finishing touches to a beautiful yet perfect picture of my cousin Valerie, stood a slight delicately made young man. There was something rather foreign in his appearance and air; in the marked profile, pale complexion, and splendid full black eyes as they rested in most rapt admiration on the face glowing with beauty, drawn so life-like, that as I entered, I started back. He noticed it; and bowing, with a smile lighting up his face, he said:—

“ I trust you think I have succeeded ? ”

“ It is admirable, wonderful,” I answered,

“but, if anything, more beautiful than Valerie.”

“That could not be possible,” he replied, with a slight foreign accent; and while he pronounced the words, he fixed his eyes, in such fond admiration on his own work, that I wondered if any deeper feeling made him look thus than the mere pleasure of having succeeded so well in the task he had undertaken. As I wondered, the original entered: she coloured deeply, and fixed a look on me, a look such as Valerie alone can give, clear, searching, suspicious; but as the artist turned, she smiled sweetly, saying:—

“I am sure my cousin must think it like, though flattered,” she added laughing. He did not say to her, as he did to me, that could not be; but as their eyes met, such a look of affection rested on her, that she was silent, and evidently happy. I wondered, as I gazed on them both, whether any real affection existed between them;

on his part, perhaps, but surely Valerie, the worldly-minded, proud Valerie, even had her heart been interested, *she* would never give her hand to one, unknown, dependent, as I concluded this stranger must be ; yet, she cared for him ; yes, in her clear eyes, as they rested on his, in the tremulous tone of her voice, the restlessness of her manner, I perceived her one fixed and only attachment through life. On my uncle coming into the room, Valerie seated herself on a sofa at some distance ; it might have appeared carelessly done, and unintentional ; but I knew her character well ; she never acted without some hidden motive, some deep-laid train of treachery ; and I guessed her motive for acting thus : it was, as her whole conduct evinced, to deceive.

“ Who is that young artist ? ” I said to my uncle, after dinner, “ he seems very clever.”

“ His name is Louis Daubeney ; he is extremely clever in his profession ; his

father was English, but his mother an Italian. This is his first year in England, and his pictures are much admired, he was recommended to me by Lord Falconhurst : I wished to have Valerie taken, and asked him here. He is badly off, poor fellow, and seems quiet and unassuming."

" He has certainly succeeded wonderfully with Valerie," I replied, and as I said it, turned to look at her ; but neither she nor Mr. Daubeney was in the room : Miss St. Ledger was finishing a sketch at the table, and an old gentleman, a friend of my uncle's, was asleep on the sofa. I took a candle, and crossed the old Hall, stopping now and then to view the different family pictures more distinctly, gazing in vain for one beloved face that ever haunted me in the full richness of her beauty ; and in that last moment of her life, when, supported in my arms, she breathed her parting sigh on a world she had cherished till its instability disgusted her, and its vain deceitful pleasures

left her as I knew her first. At length, voices reached my ears, not in the Hall, however ; for vast as it was, each object was clearly shown ; but, evidently, from the sound, not very distant. A clear tone I well knew, though softened and full of earnestness, and a manly voice, deep and full ; and in such passionate pleading did he seem to speak, that I felt he had but one object to gain, and I mourned that one so young and gifted must plead in vain. Vain, indeed, I thought would be the hope of a young and poor artist aspiring to the rich and beautiful Valerie ! I could not hear the words ; and not wishing to listen, I mounted the stairs. Presently, a door opened, at the end of the Hall near which I had been standing ; and Valerie issued forth alone, bright and joyous-looking. No tears dimmed her eyes ; no shade of sorrow rested on her clear white brow ; only the rose hue deepened on her cheek, and a brighter prouder smile on her small red lips, as she smiled to

herself, treading with stately step her own halls. No start, either, as she perceived me on the staircase, no token of alarm ; only a dark expression overspread her face, a look, as if she would gladly have stabbed me, as I stood looking at her.

“ Come, Inez, into the hall with me ; I have been wandering about through the different rooms to see how we can manage to give a ball here : Miss St. Ledger fancied it would be better to dance in the hall than in the large drawing-room, and perhaps it would. What do you think ? ”

“ I agree with Miss St. Ledger,” I answered.

The thought of a ball so soon after my aunt’s death rather startled me, and I added :—

“ You really intend having a ball soon, then ? ”

“ Certainly,” she replied : “ am I to be immured in these old halls till I grow as grim and stiff as those old ancestors of mine

hung round us here? what strange notions you have, Inez!"

It was evident to me, from her saying this, that she had read my thoughts. She walked away quickly, and mingled with the group in the drawing-room, who had gathered round Louis Daubeney's picture of Valerie, admiring the wonderful talent displayed.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FEW days afterwards Mr. St. Leger arrived, and although not exactly an idiot, as Valerie had described him, he was certainly far from prepossessing, either in person or manner. Perhaps his being a nobleman's son raised him in her estimation, for she certainly made much of him, and gave him almost her whole attention. Yet, when she fancied herself unnoticed, her glance would rest on Louis Daubeney with the same look of fond affection I had before noticed. I was puzzled at the deep game she was playing, and watching it would interest me during

my stay there. I don't think my uncle was pleased with the number of guests Valerie had collected around her, and sometimes when sounds of laughter and mirth echoed through the old halls, it seemed to jar on his feelings. He was certainly an altered man, and yet Valerie's power was supreme, She it was who planned riding-parties, luncheons, and dances of an evening, and though none of the guests, with one exception, seemed to care for the cold haughty beauty, they liked the amusements she afforded them daily, and were glad enough to pass some weeks pleasantly away at Wentworth Court. I, too, entered gladly into these amusements, and although Valerie endeavoured as much as possible to keep me in the background, and treat me like a dependent companion, more than like her cousin, I managed, nevertheless, to enjoy myself, and already felt better for the change. It was certainly mortifying to my pride sometimes, the slights Valerie so plainly showed me, and

when the young people around me wondered that I so seldom rode on horseback, I could not tell *them* that Valerie scarcely ever even proposed my joining the riding-parties she was continually making. I noticed there was always a riding-horse at the young artist's service, and that he rode by her side each day, for I would watch them sometimes winding down the long avenue from my window. I fancy it never for a moment entered the minds of her guests, that there could be any love-making between the beautiful heiress of Wentworth Court and a poor artist. It was evidently Miss St. Leger's intention that Valerie should marry her brother, who, I plainly perceived, intended it also, and began paying her as much attention as lay in his power, though he looked as if he would gladly allow his sister to arrange the matter for him, and be saved the trouble of paying court to Valerie, who exacted the attention of all around her as a right.

Time passed quickly by, and as it drew near Christmas I heard plans discussed for a ball. Nearly three hundred persons were to be invited. Cards were printed; people from London sent for to decorate the ball-room, and provide the supper and the band. Yet, not a year had passed since my aunt's death. Valerie, in flinging aside her deep mourning, seemed at the same time to have cast from her all remembrance of her mother. As I gazed at my aunt's beautiful picture I thought how soon the dead were forgotten, and how would her pride have suffered if any one had whispered to her, when in the height of her power and beauty, that nine months after her death the very recollection of her would have died away as though she had never been. Valerie seemed determined that Louis Daubenev should linger on after her own picture was completed. She entreated, and in fact insisted on her father having his likeness taken, also on Miss St. Leger having hers, telling

her that it was a real charity to the poor young man, and he stayed on till Christmas: so did the St. Legers. That Valerie had made up her mind to marry Mr. St Leger I was now convinced, and wondered, in pity, that the unfortunate ill-fated young artist did not perceive that though in love with him, she would not let that stand in the way of her ambition. Well, the evening of the ball arrived, and a perfect scene of light and beauty did those spacious halls appear, glittering with brilliant lustres, draperies of clear muslin with circlets of white roses and red geranium intermixed. Leading to the supper-room was an archway of holly and other evergreens, and beyond it the conservatory, with all the rarest and loveliest plants, just lit with the faintest light possible. The air was rich with the perfume from the orange trees, and the whole seemed like some fairy vision to me, as I wandered there alone. I thought my uncle looked on Valerie with great fondness and pride, as

she came sauntering through the gorgeous scene in readiness to welcome her guests. She was dressed all in white, her costly moire antique dress hung in rich ample folds, sweeping her halls ; a circlet of pearls confined her golden hair, which hung in beautiful ringlets to her slender waist ; proud and radiant did she look, as, with an air of triumph, she cast her eyes hastily round the gay scene, and then at her own beautiful image in the mirrors that hung around her. My dress, of white Tarlatan, had not been worn since Ellen's wedding. Valerie looked at me with a contemptuous expression of disdain, and without addressing a single word to me, turned and began talking to Mr. Daubeney, who had just entered the room, and they set off together to the conservatory. Soon the sound of carriages made them hurry back, and Valerie's face was lighted up by the bright colour of her cheeks, which had been pale as marble when she left the hall. Soon the

company assembled : the band struck up ; lovely faces and graceful forms flew past in rapid succession, and I was soon whirling away, like the rest, entering gaily into it. In the pause of a waltz with Louis Daubeney, who, out of spirits at not being able to dance with Valerie, was standing, seemingly forgetful of my presence, watching her intently, she suddenly stopped close to us, and with much scorn and sarcasm in her tone, said—

“ Really, Inez, considering how much you disapproved of the ball being given, you seem sharing pretty well in its enjoyments ;” and then, whispering something to my partner, she tossed her head back proudly, and began dancing. I think Louis Daubeney felt pity for me ; for, after Valerie left, he asked me if I would go into the conservatory and rest, which I readily agreed to. Many people were sauntering in and out ; but the partner I was engaged to dance with, not appearing, I begged of Mr. Daubeney not to remain, and to lose his

dance, which, after awhile, he agreed to ; and I remained sitting by the beautiful orange trees. All had hurried to the ball-room, and in a few minutes I was alone ; but presently a side door from the conservatory opened, and some one entered quickly, and approached me. I instantly remembered Mr. Huntingdon, whom I had met at his sister's wedding. I had not then noticed, in all my sad conflict of feeling, how very handsome he was. We left the conservatory to dance a quadrille together, and I little thought then of all that would ensue from that night's renewed acquaintance. I remember how his conversation pleased me ; and if there had not been so much that was painful in connection with the family, I would gladly have sat and talked with him, instead of dancing with strangers. He left me, after engaging me for the country dance ; and, in the meanwhile, Valerie came quickly up to me, and, in a tone of haughty displeasure, asked how I came to be dancing

with Mr. Huntingdon? I explained who he was.

“ Oh! then he is the young man Mr. Gresham introduced to me just now? he told me that his friend, Mr. Huntingdon, had arrived unexpectedly, and he had taken the liberty of bringing him; it never struck me at the time that he was Mrs. Churchill’s brother.”

She moved off to where he was standing, and began talking to him. I so well remember watching them, and wondering in my own mind whether he would be as much fascinated with my beautiful cousin as most people were. On Louis Daubeney’s face rested a look of trouble, his eyes following Valerie with an anxious loving gaze. He was not dancing, but leaning against the door in silent abstraction, while Mr. St. Leger looked as usual, perfectly at his ease, and to all outward appearance utterly indifferent whom Valerie danced with or flirted with: whether this arose from con-

fidence or indifference, I could not quite make out. It seemed to me, as if from that night began another new and strange era in my life; for from that time I date my first acquaintance with Charles Huntingdon, and for a time the unpleasantness it brought to both. Clearly before me now comes that pleasant merry country dance; glad to have Mr. Huntingdon as a partner, I heeded no longer Valerie's angry or scornful looks. She was dancing with Mr. St. Leger, and as she could not dance with two people at once, I wondered why she should so have grudged me this pleasure. It was natural of course, that Mr. Huntingdon should speak of his sister and Edward Churchill. Yet, when he did so, a cold feeling at my heart would fain have made me turn the conversation to something pleasanter; but I dreaded, by doing so, raising any suspicion in his mind. Some words he uttered that evening, struck me as being both strange and true.

“ I am glad you are so fond of Ellen,” he said, “ I shall so miss her when I go home ; for although she will not be far from us, I am one of those who think that when a sister marries, she is in a great measure lost to one. I don’t know, Miss Wentworth, whether Ellen’s marriage surprised you as it did all of us ; for my part, it has been, and always will be a mystery to me—not but what I like Churchill exceedingly ; but her infatuation for a man whom *I* never believed to have entertained the same enthusiastic feeling for her, has I own surprised me.”

He paused : I remained silent ; for I wondered, as he said this, if any idea of the truth of the matter floated through his mind, that, to almost a stranger, he should have uttered such a sentiment. A fear that something of the truth had flashed on him, caused me, in some confusion, to begin talking on some other subject.

“ I see plainly you don’t like talking of

your guardian," said Mr. Huntingdon, having a young lady's horror of that dreaded name. "So let us go to supper, and forget all about him."

It was indeed a name that brought most sad and painful memories, yet not in the way he thought. It was a relief, however, to put a stop to the conversation. Soon after the company dispersed; the lights were dying out, flowers hanging faded on the garnished walls, a perfect wreck of beauty; and I was soon asleep, and dreamt that Charles Huntingdon and Edward Churchill met, and that angry words passed between them, Mr. Huntingdon taunting Edward with love for me and treachery to Ellen; and all I could say fell unheeded, and terror and agony of mind assailed me. I woke with a faint despairing cry, and was thankful it was but a dream.

Two days after this, among the cards on the hall table, I recognised Mr. Huntingdon's, and heard from Mr. St. Leger, who

had met him out hunting, that he was to leave the neighbourhood the following day. Ellen had not written often, but after some little time she sent me a few lines, saying they were now settled in their new home, which they had taken for a year. It was beautifully situated, she wrote, and only two miles from her old home. I must *promise* to come in the spring, and judge of its beauty. They would both be delighted to see me. When I had read her letter, I sat thinking deeply and sadly over the course I must pursue. *I* had so struggled with my own weak heart, and so rooted out, I hoped and prayed, every feeling for him, that I trusted with his strong, manly, vigorous mind, he would have done the same long before, perhaps, and we might meet again as old and dear friends, without the bitterness of the past, or fear of the future. Between me and this calm and happier feeling, there arose that one long, sad, fatal glance he had cast on me, as I stood at the altar on

his marriage day, darkening and stifling the very air I breathed, and my decision was made. I could not accept their invitation *now*.

One afternoon, a few weeks after the ball, I was walking alone in the shrubbery, strewn over with withered leaves, looking as desolate as walks will look, when, after a long continued frost, the rain has come pouring down, scattering far and wide all that the frost had bound up in his icy grasp for many weeks. It was a dull, misty sort of day; the wide fields beyond looked dark and wintry; the sky one dense mass of grey cloud; the leafless trees, and absence of all flowers in the garden beyond, made me feel, like nature, very dismal. On a garden seat, at the end of the shrubbery, sat Louis Daubeney alone; his head bent down, resting on his white delicate hands; his long, dark waving hair flung off his brow. I saw him clearly in the distance, though he did not perceive me. A rustling sound amid the

thick evergreens arrested my attention, and looking round, I saw Valerie, flushed, agitated, and weeping, hurrying away. I quickly chose the opposite path, for fear Valerie should perceive me, and with her usual suspicion, fancy I had been watching their proceedings; and I saw her quickly cross the lawn, and enter the house; and not till then did I resume my walk in the shrubbery, taking care, however, not to intrude on poor Louis Daubeney's grief. Sincerely did I pity him, believing his to be a heart-affection for Valerie, who, although I believe she did love him as much as her selfish and hard nature was capable of doing, would, I well knew, not hesitate in sacrificing his affection, or even breaking his heart to satisfy her ambition. I would fain have gone and soothed his anguish as I best could; but knew well how vain words of comfort are in such bitter moments. I, a comparative stranger to him, how could I intrude on grief heart-rending as his?

I turned towards the house with a feeling of sorrow. What I had just witnessed stirred within me a grief which I had hoped was, if not obliterated, silenced.

The remembrance of it however seemed to cause fresh wounds on what time had in a measure healed. I learned that evening that Louis Daubeney was to leave Wentworth Court the following day. I believe my uncle thought he had been there long enough ; whether he had any suspicion that Valerie had any preference for him, I could not quite make out ; but I fancied he watched them that evening, and there was an irritability in his manner towards her, that I had never noticed before. Yet, they were very guarded : she wished him good-bye, like the rest of us ; and we all retired to our rooms. Her room was along the same floor as mine ; long after the house was still, I fancied I heard her door softly open, and a stealthy step descend the stairs. It was clear to me that it was *then* their

parting took place. Why she thus encouraged a lover she never intended to marry, I could not understand. She appeared the next morning at breakfast with the same cheerful careless air as usual; yet I noticed a sunken expression under her eyes, as though sleep had not visited them that night; and an anxious expression would pass over her face at times, proving to me that her cheerfulness was assumed. Mr. St. Leger proposed that they should ride early that morning, as it was clear and bright, which the weather had not been for some time; and Valerie gladly consented, and ran to get her habit on. When she was mounting her beautiful and spirited horse, I thought Mr. St. Leger fixed his eyes on her with as much admiration as it was in his power to bestow upon anyone; and certainly I had never seen her look more lovely. There was more feeling in her face, a slight tinge of melancholy depicted there, as she rode off; called forth, I

fancied, by the absence of one who had for many weeks gazed lovingly on her face, as he had assisted her to mount her horse, and ridden by her side. Yet no one seemed to have noticed their affection, or her change of manner. I made no remark to her upon the subject; indeed, I managed to keep as clear of her society as it was possible to do; and whenever the weather was fine, spent most of my days out of doors. I began to wonder whether the St. Legers intended residing altogether at Wentworth Court: their visit seemed a very long one; but at last I heard Miss St. Leger say they really must be going in a day or two; and it seemed an arranged plan that Valerie was to spend most of the ensuing season with them in town. It appeared to me, that there was a perfect understanding existing between them, which caused me to think, that if Mr. St. Leger had not yet proposed to my cousin, it was decidedly his intention to do so. He evidently admired her ex-

tremely ; and, although a man of large expectations, Wentworth Court and three thousand a-year were not to be despised.

After they had left, Valerie did not appear the least out of spirits ; and one day as we were talking together, she said—

“ I suppose you have with your usual quickness,” laying a great stress on the last word, “ found out, Inez, that I am soon going to be married ; and I need hardly ask you whom I have chosen, for it can be no secret.”

“ There are certainly only two people I could have thought of,” I answered, “ but I had not guessed things were as settled as they seem to be.”

“ Two people !” she replied, turning pale as she spoke, “ I know not what you allude to. Mr. St. Leger is the only one whose attentions I have received. I own I am in perfect ignorance of any other.”

Dreading another angry scene, I merely replied—

“ Perhaps not ; only, among the number of your admirers, it would be difficult to say which you had chosen.”

She did not look quite satisfied, but answered—

“ I know there are numbers in love with me, but I do not think I have encouraged any one but Robert. We are to be married the end of June, and I leave this the beginning of April ; papa will accompany me. I suppose, as Mr. and Mrs. Churchill are such dear friends of yours, they will be willing to receive you at that time.”

“ I have already received an invitation from them,” I replied, “ and even if they could not have me, Mrs. Holford, whom I was at school with, has begged of me to stay with her, so I shall go to her first.”

Thus our conversation ended, and the three months that elapsed between that and Valerie’s departure for London, passed quietly enough. A kind letter from Mrs. Holford, inviting me to stay with her as

long as I pleased, made me determine to accept her invitation ; accordingly, the beginning of April, I left Wentworth Court for the school where all my childhood had passed.

Only one year had elapsed since I left school, and yet what a world of thought had passed over me since then ! Leaving it, with the thoughts and feelings of a child, free from all anxiety, and knowing nothing of life, its enjoyments, or its sorrows, I now returned ; how changed !

As I drove up to the old iron gates that closed it from the road, and heard the deep sound of the bell summoning the school-girls to their evening meal, I wished that I had never passed those gates, and that with the same light heart and untroubled feeling I was again a mere school-girl, not a thinking and unhappy woman. For a moment I mourned that I had come where I was so forcibly reminded of my change of feeling, but the next, Mrs. Holford's kind face was

beaming a warm welcome, and a rush and hum of many voices among my old playmates, eager to embrace me, made me feel that with such warm true hearts still beating there was much to live for and be happy. It was indeed almost worth while to have left, now I saw the joy depicted on so many faces at my return, and I determined for a time to banish all disagreeable thoughts, and in Mrs. Holford's kind presence, lose, if possible, the remembrance of what had caused my grief. I need not enter fully into my visit to Brompton: the quiet of that time seems like an oasis in a burning desert, it was so fresh and calm! Although I told my kind friend of the manner in which my life had been spent since I parted from her, I shrank from telling her of my love affair with Edward Churchill. Sometimes I fancied she looked into my face with the expression of one who felt that something still lingered in my mind untold, and would fain have solved the mystery; but I

could not make up my mind to tell her : rather would I allow the past to rest in oblivion, throwing no shadow on my present peace, but letting it lie silent and forgotten. There had been two girls at the school when I left, who, among the many I cared for, were most prominent in my affection, daughters of a clergyman. The elder of the two had left, but the younger sister, who still remained with Mrs. Holford, told me that her sister had married a rich Scotch laird, and was settled in the Highlands. She had written to tell me of it, but supposed she had not directed the letter rightly ; receiving no answer, she concluded it had never reached me, which was the case. I wrote a long letter of congratulation to my friend, now Mrs. Mackenzie, and was delighted to receive a kind answer, containing a most pressing invitation to visit her in her highland home.

“ My husband is most anxious,” she wrote, “ to make the acquaintance of my best

friend ; therefore, dear Inez, you must come : you and my sister Mary can manage to travel together, and remember, I take no refusal."

What a delightful scheme this appeared and I accepted it with many thanks. After awhile pressing letters from Ellen Churchill came, begging me to visit them in their new home. Refusing her was very painful to me, but I did so, knowing it was best and right.

I was glad I had accepted Mrs Mackenzie's invitation. I would not look back : onward now must be my course ; onward through bleak and rugged paths, perhaps, whence the sound of loved voices would be banished ; where all that had been lovely in the past, must be obliterated for ever,—let it be.

In each life some secret vein of grief lies dark and still ; it finds no utterance : lighter griefs are spoken of, and gain sympathy ; but the deepest who can fathom ?

CHAPTER XX.

It was during my visit to Mrs. Mackenzie that I fell in again with Charles Huntingdon. It may appear perhaps strange that I have mentioned him but casually ; strange, because in reviewing the past I could see so many reasons to prove he liked me, and yet, at the time, my mind, my heart, senses, and in fact every feeling, were all so absorbed in others that his quiet affection had remained unnoticed and uncommented on. Had I noticed it, I well knew, from the slight acquaintance I had with Sir Charles and Lady Huntingdon, and from all Edward

Churchill had told me of their characters, that *they* would never hear of their only son marrying a portionless girl, who possessed neither rank nor riches, and I therefore should never have encouraged his attentions. My visit to my old school-fellow would have remained unmarked by any event, one calm, happy, quiet course of existence, had it not chanced that Charles Huntingdon had gone to Scotland much about the same time I had done, found out from Ellen where I was staying, and during the shooting season had taken a house in the same neighbourhood. He received much attention from the Mackenzies, and was continually at their house, joining us at the different picnics and excursions we made in their beautiful neighbourhood; and a pleasant acquisition he was to our little circle. I will not here speak much of what passed, but merely say that his offer was quietly but decidedly refused. Yet, when we parted he

said, looking into my eyes kindly, but so earnestly—

“ I know you have many reasons for refusing me ; some that you have stated, others that you have concealed, perhaps kindly to spare me pain.”

I remember, when he said this, that the startled look that must have flashed from me, arrested for a moment his attention, for he said—

“ Whatever I may think, Miss Wentworth, I will not speak ; but will you say this one word of comfort before I leave, that if, in time, you find me steady to my resolve of striving for your love, you will at least endeavour to give me, in return, the affection that it is my only aim in life to win. You are mysterious, Miss Wentworth ; your life seems to me full of mystery.”

“ *Mine !*” I said, looking up.

“ Yes, your conduct to your guardian and my sister is strange and unaccountable.

You would not accept any invitation from them, and yet you travel to Scotland to see people you know little of. You have offended Ellen somewhat, I fear, and Mr. Churchill looks so strange and unhappy in speaking of you. I know not what has made you act thus. You tell me you are engaged to no one; in love with no one now, and yet so decided is your refusal; so gentle your manner; so sorrowful your look when I speak of my affection for you, that you seem wrapped in a cloud of mystery I cannot pierce through. Yet, I will not trouble you; I am going to travel for some time; I shall hope on. *I* shall not change. You may meet some one you care for more than me, but promise me," he added, earnestly, "you will not marry without letting me know?"

"I shall not love anyone, nor engage myself to anyone, Mr. Huntingdon," I answered, weeping. "I do not give you hope that I may become your wife; but I can

safely say you will not hear of my marriage. You have this promise, and it is my conviction, that I shall not marry at all."

I could not allow myself to say more than this; I wished the interview to be over; but I had one question to ask, had he told Sir Charles Huntingdon of his attachment to me? he said, he had not, but that he intended doing so, before leaving England.

"I shall not care," he said, "for all the angry words I may receive; they will pass by like the wind, unheeded. My greatest thought in life is you, and I shall wait patiently to the end."

With these words, he left me. Now I did not doubt his sincerity; but I gladly thought that he was too young to admit of my refusal causing him any real misery; that no doubt, in his travels, he would meet some one he would like far better than me. I did not at that time know the deep root his love for me had taken. Sometimes I

received a short hurried note from Ellen ; they were in Paris, very gay, and did not intend coming home till the following winter. They did not return for some time, and when they did, made but a short stay at their new home ; they evidently liked the life on the continent. I, after remaining a long time with my kind friends, the Mackenzies, made an arrangement with Mrs. Holford to stay with her. In that time of quiet, I not alone gained peace and strength, but I was enabled to help my old friend ; and with many little acts of usefulness, and my time fully occupied, nearly two years passed by quickly and happily. Soon after Mr. Huntingdon's departure, I received an impertinent angry letter from his mother, alluding to her son's affection for me ; the tone so unlady-like and unfeeling, that I felt glad I had refused him ; and merely wrote a few lines to say, that, as I had decidedly refused Mr. Huntingdon,

thought her letter unnecessary and uncalled for, and I did not hear again.

Edward Churchill never wrote to me at all; Ellen but seldom; yet, when she did, her letters were kind, and generally pressing me to visit them. I therefore resolved to spend a short time with them in Germany the following summer. I hoped that time had obliterated the past to Edward Churchill, that I should find him happy, and giving Ellen the affection she so well deserved, for her long and constant affection for him. Of Charles Huntingdon I heard nothing.

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